



Perceived corporate social responsibility and customers' behaviors in the ridesharing service industry

Myunghee Mindy Jeon^{a,*}, Seonjeong Lee (Ally)^b, Miyoung Jeong^c

^a Bertolon School of Business, Salem State University, Salem, MA, USA

^b Hospitality Management, College of Education, Health and Human Services, Kent State University, Kent, OH, USA

^c School of Hotel, Restaurant, and Tourism Management, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC, USA

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate how a firm's corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices affect customers' attitudes, their self-brand connection, and, in turn, brand preference with ridesharing services (e.g., Uber). Adopting a second-order construct of perceived corporate social responsibility (PCSR) reflected from three CSR dimensions—environment, economy, and ethics—this study posited PCSR influences customers' brand attitudes, self-brand connection, and brand preference. A total of 300 valid responses was collected from a convenience sample. Results revealed PCSR showed significant impacts on customers' brand attitudes and self-brand connection. However, no direct impact of PCSR on customers' brand preference was identified, while mediation effects were detected between PCSR and brand preference by brand attitudes and self-brand connection. This study also discussed the managerial and theoretical implications of PCSR practices for a ridesharing service industry.

1. Introduction

Evolving from the traditional economy system, a new business model based on the sharing economy (e.g., Airbnb, Uber, etc.) has shifted slowly customers' consumption behaviors to sharing and reusing products and services from owning and consuming them. According to Belk (2004), sharing an economy's fundamental business principles lies in acquiring and distributing an underutilized resource for a fee or other form of monetary compensation. Even though sharing economy business models have played key business challenges to conventional accommodations, transportation, and other consumer goods, they are now becoming major market drivers, since their business practices are highly implemented through social networks and digital communications, sustaining the eco-friendly environment (Wang and Ho, 2017). Firms that adopt sharing economy business models develop platforms to connect service providers and end users, based upon demand. Due to the advancement of information technology, the sharing economy has become emerged as a trend transforming society and the business world today (Lee et al., 2018). For instance, Uber has proven successful in adopting such a business model and is currently fast-growing (PwC, 2015). Smartphone apps enable customers to use ridesharing services more easily and conveniently. According to research conducted by PwC (2015), 8% of all adults in the U.S. have participated in some form of

automotive sharing. Among them, millennials or generations Y (born between 1982 and 1994) and Z (born from 1995 onwards) are notably using ridesharing services.

By sharing resources with others, the sharing economy businesses have exerted similar principles to those of firms' social responsibility and sustainability through high reliance on technology with a focus on sharing, reusing, and recycling (Cooper, 2016). The success of sharing economy businesses in the current consumer market comes from their adoption of the corporate social responsibility (CSR) principles as a core business value (Liu et al., 2014) and a tool for branding acknowledgment (Hoeffler and Keller, 2002). Researchers (i.e., Nina, 2017; Wang and Ho, 2017) have started to place a keen interest in identifying business values for sharing economy and examining exemplary practices of CSR that can mutually benefit the community economy and engagement. Although numerous studies have examined various impacts of CSR on firms' marketing activities, some research gaps exist in a sharing economy business (Liu et al., 2014).

By identifying the relationships between perceived corporate social responsibility (PCSR) and sharing economy businesses, this study aims to answer two imminent research questions: (1) based upon increased research on the various effects of CSR and the fact CSR has emerged as a mandated priority for business leaders globally (Porter and Kramer, 2006), do CSR practices play a significant role in customers' perceptions

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: mjeon@salemstate.edu (M.M. Jeon), slee89@kent.edu (S. Lee), JEONGM@mailbox.sc.edu (M. Jeong).

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of CSR that may affect customers' behavioral intentions with a sharing economy business? and (2) what practices are effective for customers' perceptions of a company's CSR? More specifically, this study investigates whether customers' PCSR practices (i.e., to the environment, economy, and ethics) influence their attitudes and self-brand connection toward a ridesharing service firm (e.g., Uber or Lyft), and, in turn, their brand preferences. Although brand preference has been widely studied by numerous scholars (i.e., Heilman et al., 2000; Liu and Smeesters, 2010), the current understanding of PCSR's impacts on customers' attitudes and connection toward a firm or its brand are limited (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001; Singh et al., 2008). Moreover, studies of PCSR practices affecting customer behavior in a ridesharing service industry have been rarely conducted.

2. Literature review

2.1. Sharing economy via the digital environment

The idea of sharing resources has become popular in today's business landscape, due to the economic crisis and increased concerns about protecting the environment (Kathan et al., 2016). The sharing economy has shifted the way customers experience goods and services, and their understanding of the ownership of goods (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012; Botsman and Rogers, 2010), since people have shared resources over the years (Babione, 1964), such as washing machines or ski rentals.

Berry and Maricle (1973) first discussed the benefits of sharing resources for businesses and customers. The sharing economy has characteristics of non-ownership, temporary access, and redistribution of goods for monetary or non-monetary compensation (Kathan et al., 2016). The sharing economy is also called 'collaborative consumption' or 'access-based consumption' (Hartl et al., 2016; Hamari et al., 2016). Following Ertz, Durif, and Arcand (2016), this study refers sharing economy (collaborative consumption) to peer-to-peer based transactions on dedicated online platforms, which enable users to acquire and provide resources or services in transient peer-to-peer relationships with monetary exchange. Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) explained the motivation of collaborative consumption is customers prefer to pay for the experience of temporarily accessing things, instead of buying and owning things, or customers are able to access objects or service they cannot afford to own or decide not to own, due to space constraints or environmental concerns. So et al. (2018) also examined motivations of using and developing an attitude toward Airbnb that include price value, enjoyment, and home benefits.

The proliferation of business models for sharing economy can be explained by different factors, including Internet-based technologies, the global economic crises, and increased interests in sustainable consumption (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012). Among these different factors, Internet-based technologies foster connections among people, offer a variety of sharing platforms worldwide, and enable a more prevalent sharing economy (Cohen and Kietzmann, 2014). For instance, Internet-based technologies enable business models for sharing economy to be more price competitive, convenient, and environmentally sustainable, and make them more accessible and flexible to people (Botsman and Rogers, 2010). A variety of sharing economy platforms have drawn compelling business interests from both providers and users. This also provides a secure transaction platform, by screening the backgrounds of providers and users (Kathan et al., 2016). For instance, Lyft, a ride-sharing platform, only selects drivers, who pass its background checks, have not been involved in any accidents, and have not received more than two traffic tickets during the past three years (Kathan et al., 2016). With the incremental benefits of sharing economy, this type of business model is expected to grow (Kathan et al., 2016).

In spite of the benefits of sharing economy, the sharing economy has received concerns, due to its socially irresponsible practices (Hwang, 2019). There are tax and labor issues, due to missed tax revenues in the sharing economy business models (Hwang, 2019). Customers also

criticize unpleasant incidents when they use sharing economy services (Rauch and Schleicher, 2015). Customers further question the business models in the sharing economy, since the sharing economy has shifted from the original idea of sharing to traditional capitalism (Hwang, 2019). For instance, Airbnb has been converted to commercial businesses in certain big cities (Hill, 2016). These concerns and issues need properly handled for the long-term sustainability of the sharing economy.

Various topics have been explored in the sharing economy context. Prior research in the sharing economy investigated customers' motivation to share (So et al., 2018), experience formulation (Pappas, 2019), customers' use intention (Min et al., 2018), sharing services (Kim et al., 2018), business models for the sharing economy (Leung et al., 2019), and a comparison between hotels and sharing economy (Akbar and Tracogna, 2018; Mody et al., 2019) in the hospitality industry. For instance, Mody et al. (2019) compared the sharing economy and the hotel industry to provide sophisticated models of experiential consumption in the hospitality industry. They identified the hospitableness of hotel staff as a key variable that influenced customers' desirable experiential outcomes, such as emotions, memorability, and brand loyalty. Min et al. (2018) also investigated customers' adoption of the Uber mobile application. Their study identified compatibility, complexity, observability, and social influence positively influenced perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, which further influenced attitudes and adoption intentions.

Among different business models of the sharing economy, ride-sharing is one of the most high-profile, access-based contexts (Botsman and Rogers, 2010). Ridesharing is also known as ride resourcing, vehicle-for-hire, or on-demand ride services (Contreras and Paz, 2018). The origins of ridesharing emerged in the 1950s when car sharing clubs first appeared in the United States (Chan and Shaheen, 2012). As Hwang (2019) argued, sharing economy has shifted to the commercial based business model from the original idea of underused resource sharing. Contreras and Paz (2018) noted that today's ride sharing is implicating "ride-hailing" practices as Belk (2014) identified "pseudo-sharing" in commercial car-sharing businesses, such as Zipcar and for-profit home sharing organizations like Airbnb. Today, the boundary for ride-sharing services has expanded to for-profit and commercial basis sharing business models. As Contreras and Paz (2018) noted, commercial ridesharing occurs when a customer requests a ride via a private vehicle through a web application from a handheld smartphone. This type of system is set-up and managed by commercialized ride-sharing companies, such as Uber and Lyft. In 2011, Uber became the first commercialized ride-hailing service in the San Francisco Bay area, followed by Lyft in the summer of 2012 (Contreras and Paz, 2018). A recent study of on-demand ride services showed the total trips made with Uber and Lyft can exceed 15% (170,000 trips per day) of all trips on a typical weekday in San Francisco (Alemi et al., 2018).

Demands for this commercialized sharing economy have increased, as evidenced in one million car sharing members in North America at the beginning of 2013 (Birdsall, 2014). Models for commercialized sharing economy business are Airbnb, Zipcar, Uber, Lyft, YouTube, and Twitter (Belk, 2014). For instance, Airbnb provides a platform where people can share part or all of their homes with others. Uber also offers a real-time, location-based, ridesharing service to others. These online platforms facilitate individuals to develop peer-to-peer relationships by establishing demand and supply of accommodations or ridesharing services (Mittendorf, 2018). These platforms enable customers to support the entire collaborative process—information request to booking confirmation—including payment procedures for accommodations or ridesharing services (Mittendorf, 2018).

2.2. CSR in the service industry

CSR is a company's activities related to its perceived societal or stakeholder obligations (Luo and Bhattacharya, 2006). They refer CSR

to a company's obligations to protect and foster the best interests of the company and the welfare of society. Examples of CSR activities include diversity initiatives, recycling/repurposing programs, community/local support programs, and donations to charity organizations/events (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001). CSR enables a company to balance its corporate interests and societal growth, which ultimately lead to the sustainable development of the company (Luo and Bhattacharya, 2006). Park, Lee, and Kim (2014) advocated CSR is an essential component of a company's strategy. When a company has strong CSR activities, the company can develop a positive image to its stakeholders (Montgomery and Ramus, 2003).

Stakeholder theory supports the company's CSR activities (Carroll, 2004; Clarkson, 1995) and explains its roles for the purpose of developing the firm's sustainable strategies and CSR activities (Steurer et al., 2005). Stakeholder theory explains the interconnected relationships between an organization and its stakeholders, including customers, suppliers, employees, investors, communities, among others (Freeman, 2010). Freeman (p. 46) referred to a stakeholder as "any group or individual who can affect, or is affected by, the achievement of the organization's objectives." Russo and Perrini (2010) advocated the applicability of stakeholder theory to investigate a large firm's CSR approach. Jones (1995) also suggested CSR can contribute to a company's profits through the favorable influence of CSR initiatives on its relationships with its stakeholders. Carroll (1991, p. 43) further emphasized the benefits of CSR, stating "there is a natural fit between the idea of corporate social responsibility and an organization's stakeholders." Among the various stakeholder groups, one of the most important stakeholders is customers for the company's CSR initiative.

CSR has received extensive attention in the service industry as well (Cha et al., 2016). In general, prior research in the service industry indicates a company's CSR activities can increase customers' trust, customer satisfaction, financial performance, and positive work outcomes by service employees (Raub and Blunschi, 2014). For instance, Casado-Díaz et al., 2014 identified the importance of CSR activities in the service industry. They described a service company's CSR activities lead to a positive impact on a firm's performance higher than a manufacturing company's CSR activities. He and Li (2011) also identified the importance of a service brand's CSR. They established a service brand's CSR resulted in brand identification, customer satisfaction, and service brand loyalty.

Previous research indicates when a company takes its social responsibility, the company is more likely to have a healthy financial performance, due to its good impression to customers (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2004). Prior research identified the role of CSR from employees' perspectives (e.g., Su and Swanson, 2019; Supanti and Butcher, 2019), customers' perspective (e.g., Cha et al., 2016; Li et al., 2019), and company's perspectives (e.g., Ghaderi et al., 2019; Song and Kang, 2019). For instance, Cha et al. (2016) investigated the effects of CSR and brand fit on service brand loyalty via personal and social identification in the context of a brand coffee shop industry. Supanti and Butcher (2019) identified corporate CSR participation enhanced millennials' organizational citizenship behaviors through meaningful work in the context of the hotel industry. Thus, investigating how customers perceive and respond to a company's CSR initiatives is worthwhile for both researchers and practitioners to gain competitive advantages among competitors.

2.3. Customers' perceived CSR of ridesharing services

CSR has been initiated from the management's idiosyncratic philanthropic activities and now has become a common, valuable activity of stakeholder management to measure a company's strategic business performance (Kolodinsky et al., 2010). As one of the key approaches to explain CSR activities, the Corporate Social Performance (CSP) model proposed by Carroll (1979, 1998) has been widely utilized to assess the importance of CSR (Smith et al., 2001). Carroll's (1998) CSP model

includes four dimensions—economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic. This economic dimension explained generating profits for stakeholders, creating jobs, and promoting the creation of innovative services and products. The legal dimension focused on a company's compliance with legal requirements. The ethical dimension described a company's activities as a member of society to achieve a company's goals and avoid social harm. And, finally, the philanthropic dimension explained a company's various philanthropic activities pertaining to support for educational institutions and the quality of life in the community.

Building upon Carroll's CSP model, Windsor (2001) viewed these four key dimensions from social relationship perspectives—the economic and legal dimensions are socially required, the ethical dimension is socially expected, and the philanthropic responsibility is socially desired. Positive consequences of socially-desired CSR practices are identified as beneficial for firms. Cheung, Welford, and Hills (2009) discussed implementing environmental CSR could benefit both manufacturers and service providers with internal circumstances (i.e., to meet corporate environmental policy) or external circumstances (i.e., to communicate with customers using a socially-responsible corporate image). Successfully implemented environmental CSR enhances the reputation of a service provider (Marin et al., 2009). Meanwhile, studies classify CSR into two general categories (i.e., Mohr et al., 2001)—the first category related to various stakeholders of the organization; the second category is based on societal marketing perspectives (Kotler and Lee, 2008). Studies also focused on different dimensions of CSR to identify the role of CSR (Wartick and Cochran, 1985; Wood, 1991). Considering Carroll's CSP model and Windsor's classification, this study determines three customers' perceived CSR (PCSR) dimensions—economy (socially-required), ethics (socially-expected), and environment (socially-desired) as first-order constructs of PCSR in the ridesharing service context.

Ridesharing services have expanded quickly with its ease of payment, complete door-to-door service, and comparatively low service fee (Contreras and Paz, 2018). The popularity of ridesharing businesses contributes to their adoption of smartphones and their built-in GPS technology by providing real-time information about wait times as well as a simplified method of payment (Young and Farber, 2019). Prior research identified effects of ridesharing on policy perspectives (Contreras and Paz, 2018; Greenwood and Wattal, 2017) and customers' adoption behaviors (Alemi et al., 2018; Min et al., 2018). For instance, Contreras and Paz (2018) investigated the effects of ride-hailing companies on the taxicab industry in Las Vegas. Young and Farber (2019) also investigated who were major users and why people used ridesharing services. Alemi et al. (2018) further investigated the factors affecting the adoption of on-demand ride services among millennials and members of the preceding Generation X in California. Prior research advocated the importance of incorporating CSR into sharing economy business models to sustain its business and to handle irresponsible business practices (Gazzola et al., 2018; Hwang, 2019). Previous research examined how ridesharing services, such as Uber, practices corporate social responsibility (Nina, 2017). Rudnicka (2017) investigated CSR issues in the collaborative economy business models as a way of sustaining the business. Wang and Ho (2017) investigated the role of CSR to enhance consumer-company identification and the perceived value of sustainability in the context of Airbnb. Gazzola et al. (2018) investigated users' motivations to use the sharing economy. They identified sustainable development related to social responsibility, socializing, knowledge, and economic incentives as important in influencing user participation in the sharing economy. Hwang (2019) stressed the importance of CSR communication in shaping the legitimacy of the sharing economy, emphasizing effective CSR communication. Rong et al. (2018) compared a sharing economy to a traditional economy in their study and concluded the sharing economy in a B2C setting can better foster the economic values to integrate CSR into creating social values. This study investigates how PCSR influences customers' brand evaluations in the ridesharing service context by

focusing on the importance of CSR in the B2C sharing economy.

2.4. Brand attitude

Brand attitude refers to customers' affective reactions toward the brand (Whan Park et al., 2010). CSR plays an important role to enhance customers' brand evaluations (He and Li, 2011). Studies identified a company's CSR strategies can improve customers' attitudes toward the company (Lichtenstein, Drumwright, & Bridgette, 2004), their behavioral intentions (Sen et al., 2006), and their brand loyalty (He and Li, 2011). Lichtenstein et al. (2004) determined implementing CSR activities leads to favorable evaluations of companies, fostering customers' attitudes towards the company and their purchasing behaviors. Studies also identified positive effects of CSR on customers' perceived brand quality in the context of the hotel industry (i.e., Liu et al., 2014). Based on prior research that established a positive association between PCSR and customers' favorable responses in different contexts (Lichtenstein et al., 2004; Sen et al., 2006), this study predicts positive effects of PCSR on brand attitude toward a ridesharing service company; thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1. Customers' PCSR has a positive effect on their attitudes toward the brand of a ridesharing service company.

2.5. Self-brand connection

The self-brand connection explains customers' tendencies to incorporate the brand into their self-concepts (Escalas and Bettman, 2003). Associations with a brand are linked to customers' mental representations of self because customers prefer to choose a brand that best represents their current self-concept or an ideal self-concept (Escalas and Bettman, 2003). Lichtenstein et al. (2004, p. 17) note, "a way that CSR initiatives create benefits for companies appears to be by increasing consumers' identification with the corporation—[and] support for the company." Prior research on customer-company identification suggested CSR initiatives included a key element of corporate identity that associated customers with the company (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003, 2004). When customers develop a sense of connection, they are more likely satisfied with a firm's service (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003). Moon et al. (2015) identified positive roles for CSR on the social self-concept connection, which further lead to customers' loyalty to the corporate brand. They compared these effects between individualist and collectivist cultures. A strong CSR activity resulted in favorable customers' evaluation of the company and toward the brand (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2. Customers' PCSR has a positive effect on their self-connection to the brand of a ridesharing service company.

2.6. Brand preference

Brand preference explains the effect of brand equity, representing customers' intentions to purchase a brand (Liu et al., 2014). Bhattacharya and Sen (2004) advocated CSR not only leads to positive effects on customers' psychological responses, but also results in positive customers' behavioral responses. Sen et al. (2006) identified CSR practices positively influenced customers' cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses. Lin et al. (2011) also emphasized the positive role of CSR activities on customers' behavioral intentions because customers develop a positive company's image through CSR activities. Previous research confirmed positive relationships between CSR and customers' responses, such as behavioral intentions (Kim et al., 2017) and brand preference (Chomvilailuk and Butcher, 2010; Liu et al., 2014). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3. Customers' PCSR has a positive effect on their preferences toward

the brand of the ridesharing service company.

The relationship between brand attitude and brand preference is well-identified (Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995). According to social identification theory (Turner, 1999), when customers hold stronger brand identification, they are more likely to engage in pro-brand activities. Wu and Wang (2014) investigated the effects of CSR perception on brand evaluations, including brand image and brand attitude. These brand evaluations further influenced customers' buying intentions. Therefore, the positive effects of brand attitude on brand preference are predicted in this study, proposing the following hypothesis:

H4. Customers' brand attitude has a positive effect on their brand preference with a ridesharing company.

Customer-company identification plays a significant role in developing CSR activities (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003, 2004). A study found positive roles for CSR with a self-concept connection with a brand led to customer preference, and, in turn, loyalty with a corporate brand (Moon et al., 2015). Along a similar vein, the self-brand connection is expected to positively influence brand preference related to customers' PCSR. A previous study discussed (Liu et al., 2014) association between brand preference and customers' purchase intentions. This study assumed that brand preference eventually affects purchase intention and they are connected to each other and can be interchanged. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5. Customers' self-brand connection has a positive effect on their brand preference with a ridesharing company.

2.7. Research framework

Shared common goals between a sharing economy, including ride-sharing services and CSR, have accelerated to make businesses implement CSR practices proactively. Three stakeholders have been key players to make sharing business models infuse CSR practices into their business—companies (Shaheen and Cohen, 2007), customers (Ballús-Armet et al., 2014), and communities (Jenny et al., 2007). When customers engaged in sharing activities, they were more likely to represent their interests in sustainable consumption (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012). Yet, CSR activities in a business model of a ridesharing service have not been actively investigated. Focusing on customers' perceptions, this study investigates the relationships of customers' PCSR, brand attitude, self-brand connection, and brand preference (see Fig. 1).

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

A ridesharing service is considered one of a popular type of sharing economy business model. For instance, Uber, a ridesharing service company, has operated in more than 250 countries and cities worldwide (PwC, 2015). Characterized by its popularity and familiarity, a ridesharing service business model was selected to test this research's framework. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the reliability and validity of the measurement model, and structural equation modeling (SEM) was conducted to test the hypotheses.

Using an online consumer panel via a professional marketing research company based in the U.S., data were collected. Individuals belonging to a consumer panel were paid through the marketing company upon completion of the survey. Participants were 18 years old or older and had used a ridesharing service, such as Uber or Lyft. A screening question determined their eligibility to participate in the study by asking whether they used a ridesharing service within the past six months. After agreeing to participate in this study, an online survey link was available for them to complete the survey during the week of

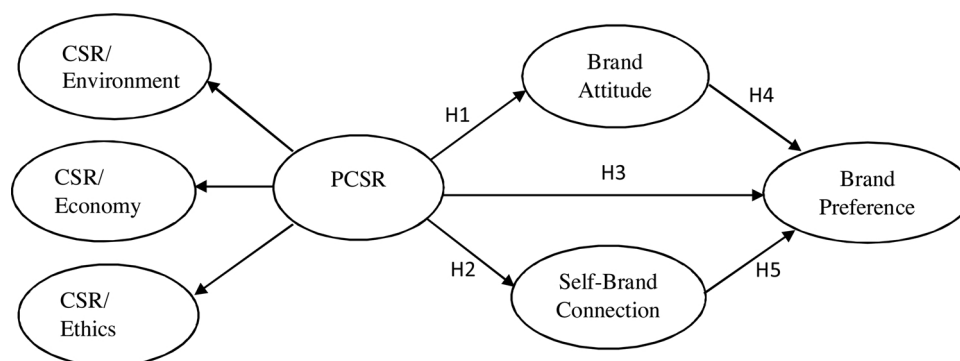


Fig. 1. PCSR and customer behavior with ride sharing services.

June 25, 2018.

The respondents' demographic information was collected at the end of the survey. To ensure all answers were attentively provided, four random attention check questions were included (Huang et al., 2012). A total of 300 usable responses were collected to test this study's framework for measuring the effects of PCSR on respondents' brand attitudes, self-brand connection, and brand preferences in the context of the ridesharing business.

3.2. Measurement items

Multiple measurement items for this study were adopted from previous studies to ensure validity and reliability of each construct. PCSR consisted of three reflective, first-order variables to form a reflective second-order construct, including environment dimension (Liu et al., 2014), economy dimension (Carroll, 1998; Song et al., 2014), and ethics dimension (Carroll, 1998; Morf et al., 1999). Variables for customer brand attitude, self-brand connection, and brand preference constructs were adopted from Escalas and Bettman (2003); Song et al. (2012a), and Song et al. (2012b), respectively. All items were measured on a five-point Likert-type scale from '1' being 'strongly disagree' to '5' being 'strongly agree'.

3.3. Data analysis

The two-step approach (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988) was adopted to investigate the relationship between independent variables reflected in the second-order constructs and dependent variables. CFA and SEM tests were conducted to explore the data, utilizing SPSS AMOS v.23. The CFA enabled researchers to examine convergent and discriminant validities. Convergent validity was tested to ensure measures of items were related to each other within the construct. Discriminant validity was checked to confirm the measures of items were unrelated to each other between constructs (Hair et al., 1998). A path analysis using SEM was conducted to test hypotheses, assessing χ^2 value, goodness-of-fit index (GFI), non-normed fit index (NNFI or TLI), comparative fit index (CFI), standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) (Hair et al., 1998).

4. Results

4.1. Characteristics of respondents

A total of 300 usable questionnaires were collected via a consumer panel with a marketing research firm and all responses were qualified for further data analysis. Respondents were evenly dispersed between male and female upon the request of the researchers. Among respondents, age cohorts consisted of Millennials (45%), Gen Xers (34%), Baby Boomers (13%) and Seniors (8%), respectively, as the overall proportion of ridesharing service customer population has been

exhibited in research (i.e., PwC, 2015). Less than half of the respondents (44%) hold a bachelor, one-third (23%) hold a master, and fewer (10%) hold a doctoral degree. More than half of the respondents were employed as manager/executives or professionals in technical fields. Nearly one-third of the respondents made an annual income between \$50,000 and \$100,000, and another one-third earned between \$100,000 and \$200,000. More than half of the respondents (56%) have used ridesharing services for up to three years, and a quarter of the respondents (25%) have used the services between three and five years. Nearly half of the respondents (48%) used ridesharing services about once a month and 40% answered they used the service as often as once a week. Table 1 summarizes the demographic profiles of the respondents.

4.2. Descriptive statistics and normality test

The measurement items show mean values ranging from 3.12 to 4.09 with standard deviations ranging from .12 to 1.22. Using the Shapiro-Wilk test, assumption normality confirmed a normal distribution of the data (George and Mallery, 2006). Skewness for all measurement items was smaller than ± 1.0 and kurtosis values were less than ± 1.7 , which appeared reasonable, confirming a normal distribution (George and Mallery, 2006).

Table 1
Demographic information (n = 300).

Demographic	Number of respondents	Percent
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	150	50
Male	150	50
<i>Age</i>		
Senior (older than 75 yr.)	25	8.3
Baby Boomer (54-74 yr. old)	40	13.3
Gen Xer (39-53 yr. old)	100	33.3
Gen Y and Z (18-38 yr. old)	135	45.1
<i>Education</i>		
High school diploma	36	12.0
Associate degree	30	10.0
Bachelor degree	133	44.3
Master degree	71	23.7
Doctoral degree	30	10.0
<i>Income</i>		
Less than \$50,000	67	22.6
Between \$50,000-\$100,000	103	34.7
Between \$100,001-\$200,000	73	24.6
Higher than \$200,000	54	18.1
<i>Occupation</i>		
Manager/executive	101	33.7
Professional/technical	65	21.7
Retired	38	12.7
Clerical/sales	25	8.3
Owner/self-employed	23	7.7
Other	48	15.9

4.3. Assessment of reliability and validity in the measurement model

In an attempt to minimize the risk of common method biases (Podsakoff et al., 2003), the split test was taken by randomly dividing the data into two groups to ensure no indications of significant differences. Harman's single factor test indicated less than 50% of the variances were explained by a single factor (i.e., Chang et al., 2010). Split-half reliability and the Spearman-Brown coefficient were checked for reliability as well as Cronbach's alpha. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test for variables indicated a good fit (.95), which means sampling adequacy for factor analysis (Cerny and Kaiser, 1977).

While conducting a CFA, three measurement items were eliminated, due to cross-loading or lower than .45 factor loading (George and Mallery, 2006) as indicated in italics (see Table 1). A total of 22 items remained for further analysis. Factor loadings for all items were larger than 0.6, indicating acceptable measurement (Hair et al., 1998). The measurement model exhibited an acceptable model fit (χ^2 (300) = 513.50, d/f = 195, p < .001, CMIN/DF = 2.63, SRMR = .05, GFI = .91, TLI (NNFI) = .93, CFI = .94, and RMSEA = .07). To assess reliability that shows the cohesiveness of each measurement item, Cronbach's α was checked and all items exceeded .70. Composite reliability showed greater than 0.78, indicating reliable internal consistency (Hair et al., 1998). The scale items used in this study, factor loading, mean, standard deviation, and Cronbach's α are presented in Table 2.

Convergent and discriminant validities were assessed to investigate construct validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The satisfactory level of convergent validity was achieved for each construct having standardized loading values larger than .68 (p < .001). Average variance extracted (AVE) for all constructs exceeded the cut-off value of .50

Table 3

Correlation, composite reliability, AVE and squared correlation matrix.

	PCSR	BA	BC	BP	AVE
PCSR	.91	.47	.59	.60	.77
BA	.69***	.78	.51	.55	.65
BC	.77***	.72***	.94	.61	.71
BP	.78***	.74***	.78***	.80	.63

Notes: PCSR = perceived CSR; BA = brand attitude; BC = self-brand connection; BP = brand preference; AVE = average variance extracted; Composite reliability is reported along the diagonal; Correlations are below the diagonal; Squared correlation of constructs are above the diagonal; *** p < .001.

(Fornell and Larcker, 1981). All AVEs were larger than the corresponding squared correlation between constructs, suggesting the fulfillment of discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Eisingerich et al., 2011). Table 3 illustrates correlations, composite reliability, AVE and squared correlation of constructs (see Table 3).

4.4. Path analysis using SEM method

Using SEM, relationships among all variables in the first- and second-order constructs were tested. Maximum likelihood estimation identified an acceptable model fit to the data (χ^2 (300) = 509.10, d/f = 195, CMIN/DF = 2.61, p < .001, SRMR = 0.049, GFI = .90, TLI = .93, CFI = .94, RMSEA = .073). The value of CMIN/DF was 2.78 (smaller than 3), indicating an adequate fit (Gefen et al., 2000). Values for GFI, TLI, and CFI were higher than .90 and considered acceptable fits. RMSEA was considered an acceptable model fit, lower than .08 (Gefen et al., 2000). SRMR was smaller than .05, indicating a good fit

Table 2

Measurement items and their key statistics.

Construct and measurement item	Loading	Mean	S.D.	α
PCSR (Second-order factor)				.94
<i>CSR dimension of Environment (ENV)</i>	.84			.95
ENV1: XX tries to sponsor pro-environmental programs.	.92	3.37	.88	
ENV2: XX tries to protect the environment.	.85	3.38	.95	
ENV3: XX tries to carry out programs to reduce pollution by controlling emissions.	.88	3.39	.94	
ENV4: XX implements special programs to reduce energy consumption (avoid excessive heat/air conditioning)	.89	3.31	.96	
ENV5: I think XX tries to encourage their drivers to use only necessary natural resources (clean gas, etc.)	.86	3.44	.96	
<i>CSR dimension of Economy (ECO)</i>	.88			.77
ECO1: XX contributes to improve the transportation industry.	.71	4.06	.89	
ECO2: XX strives to achieve sustainable growth of the sharing economy.	.88	3.77	.89	
ECO3: XX helps generate employment opportunities.				
<i>CSR dimension of Ethics (ETH)</i>	.91			.85
ETH1: XX has established ethical guidelines for business activities.	.85	3.75	.91	
ETH2: XX tries to become an ethically trustworthy company (charging reasonable fare).	.74	3.94	.85	
ETH3: XX strives to root out irregularities.	.74	3.69	.87	
ETH4: XX makes efforts to equally and fairly treat customers (avoid refusing service based on customer's gender, race, age, etc.)	.71	4.09	.78	
Brand Attitude (BA)				.77
BA1: Using XX is a good thing to do.	.92	4.03	.76	
BA2: Using XX is valuable for me.	.68	4.09	.71	
BA3: Using XX is beneficial for me.				
Self-Brand Connection (BC)				.93
BC1: XX reflects who I am.	.82	3.75	.88	
BC2: I can identify with XX.	.87	3.36	1.05	
BC3: I feel a personal connection to XX.	.88	3.12	.12	
BC4: I use XX to communicate who I am to other people.	.88	3.17	1.22	
BC5: I think XX helps me become the type of person I want to be.	.71	4.02	.77	
BC6: XX suits me well.	.87	3.33	.88	
Brand Preference (BP)				.78
BP1: I want to have fun when using XX.	.76	3.55	.93	
BP2: I hope to use XX.	.68	3.96	.78	
BP3: I want to have an unforgettable memory when using XX.	.82	3.19	1.12	
BP4: I would like to use XX.				

XX indicates a brand of a ridesharing service that a respondent mainly uses.

S.D. = Standard deviation; α = Cronbach's alpha.

Italicized variables indicate removed item from the data analysis, due to low factor loading value.

All factor loadings are significant at p < 0.05.

Table 4
Standardized parameter estimates for the structural model.

Paths	Standardized coefficient (β)	t-value	Results
H1: PCSR \rightarrow BA	.74***	10.24	Supported
H2: PCSR \rightarrow BC	.78***	11.72	Supported
H3: PCSR \rightarrow BP	.14	1.37	Not supported
H4: BA \rightarrow BP	.18*	2.24	Supported
H5: BC \rightarrow BP	.67***	8.07	Supported

Note: PCSR = perceived CSR; BA = brand attitude; BC = self-brand connection; BP = brand preference; *** $p < .001$; * $p < .05$.

(Diamantopoulos and Siguaw, 2000). Squared multiple correlations (i.e., SMC, R^2) assessed the extent to which the model explains the data's variances. PCSR dimensions for environment, economic and ethics explained 70% ($R^2 = .70$), 75% ($R^2 = .75$), and 81% ($R^2 = .81$) of the variances, respectively. SMC of endogenous variables, including brand attitude, self-brand connection, and brand preference, explained 55% ($R^2 = .55$), 61% ($R^2 = .61$), and 82% ($R^2 = .82$), respectively.

PCSR positively affected customer brand attitude ($\beta = .74$, $t = 10.24$, $p < .001$) and self-brand connection ($\beta = .78$, $t = 11.72$, $p < .001$). H1 and H2 were supported. Customer brand attitude influenced brand preference ($\beta = .18$, $t = 2.24$, $p < .02$) and self-brand connection positively influenced brand preference ($\beta = .67$, $t = 8.07$, $p < .001$). Hence, H4 and H5 are also supported. PCSR did not appear to significantly influence brand preference ($\beta = .14$, $t = 1.37$, $p > .05$) in this study. Therefore, H3 was not supported. However, the path from PCSR to brand preference exhibited strong standardized indirect effects ($\beta = .65$, $t = 8.05$, $p < .001$), implying a full mediation effect of brand attitudes and self-brand connection in the relationship between PCSR and brand preference. Table 4 and Fig. 2 illustrate the results of path analysis to test hypotheses.

4.5. Post-hoc analysis to test mediation effects using the SEM method

To test the mediation effect for BA, the path coefficient from BA to BP was speculated at 0 value to run the constraint model. The model fit indices for the constraint model ($\chi^2(300) = 514.29$, $d/f = 196$, $CMIN/DF = 2.62$, $p < .001$, $SRMR = 0.049$, $GFI = .85$, $TLI = .93$, $CFI = .94$, $RMSEA = .074$) showed an acceptable model fit. Chi-squared value of the study model ($\chi^2(300) = 509.10$, $d/f = 195$, $p < .001$) was compared to that of a constraint model ($\chi^2(300) = 514.29$, $d/f = 196$, $p < .001$) with the path from BA to BP set as 0 coefficient. The comparison demonstrated the meaningful difference ($5.19 > \Delta \chi^2(1) = 3.89$) in Chi-squared values by increasing the χ^2 value with 5.19 (larger

than 3.89) that corresponds to the value of χ^2 with one degree of freedom. This shows the constraint model is parsimonious over the study model. The standardized coefficient of the path from PCSR to BP became strongly significant ($\beta = .28$, $t = 3.40$, $p < .001$), which explains the relationship between PCSR and BP was initially significant, but BA interfered with the direct relationship between PCSR and BP to make it insignificant. Therefore, it can be iterated that BA fully mediated the relationship of PCSR to BP in this study's model.

Next, to test the mediation effect of BC, the path coefficient from BC to BP was speculated at 0 value to calculate the constraint model. The model fit indices of the constraint model ($\chi^2(300) = 567.32$, $d/f = 196$, $CMIN/DF = 2.89$, $p < .001$, $SRMR = 0.05$, $GFI = .83$, $TLI = .92$, $CFI = .93$, $RMSEA = .074$) demonstrated an acceptable model fit. The Chi-squared value of the study model ($\chi^2(300) = 509.10$, $d/f = 195$, $p < .001$) was compared to that for a constraint model ($\chi^2(300) = 567.32$, $d/f = 196$, $p < .001$) with the path from BC to BP set as 0 coefficient. The comparison demonstrated the meaningful difference ($68.22 > \Delta \chi^2(1) = 3.89$) in the Chi-squared values. The standardized coefficient of the path from PCSR to BP was strongly significant ($\beta = .77$, $t = 7.21$, $p < .001$). This explains the relationship between PCSR and BP was initially significant, but BC interfered with the direct relationship between PCSR and BP to make it insignificant. Therefore, it can be iterated that BC fully mediated the relationship of PCSR to BP in this study's model. The mediation effect of the path from PCSR to BP was tested and explained in Table 5 (see Table 5)

5. Conclusions

5.1. Discussion

Changes in customers' consumption behaviors and firms' business practices have called immediate research attention to build a linkage between customers' preferences and firms' socially-responsible activities in the context of a sharing economy. By using ridesharing service customers for this research's sample, this study identified the key dimensions of PCSR to predict customers' attitudes toward a ridesharing brand, their self-connection to the brand, and brand preferences. Using the second-order construct of PCSR reflected from the environmental, economic, and ethical dimensions of CSR, this study tested causal relationships among the variables for PCSR, brand attitude, self-brand connection, and brand preference.

Data analysis verified hypotheses 1–5 were supported, except for H3 that illustrated the direct relationship of customers' PCSR with their behavioral intentions. Findings from this study revealed customers'

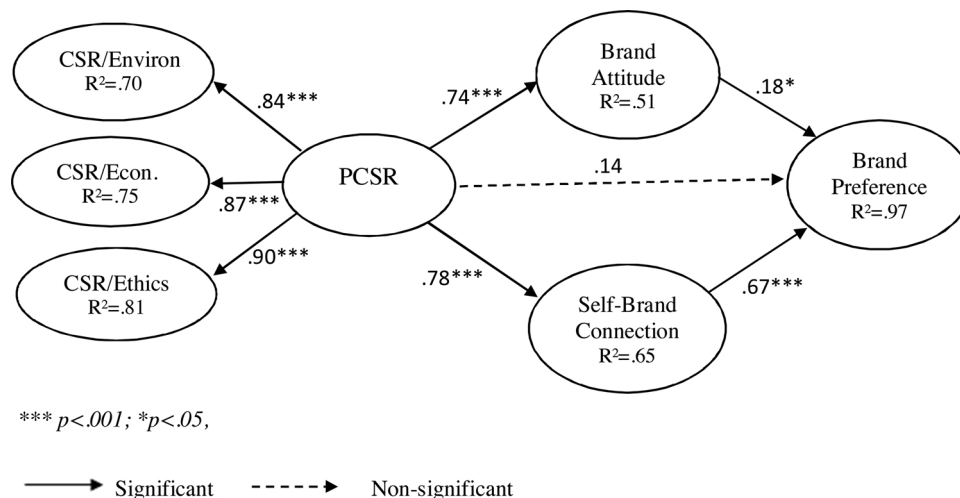


Fig. 2. The results of structural model testing.

Table 5
Testing mediation effects.

	Study model	Mediation effect of BA	Mediation effect of BC
Parsimony of model	$\chi^2 = 509.10$, d/f = 195	$\chi^2 = 514.29$, d/f = 196	$\chi^2 = 567.32$, d/f = 196
Difference of χ^2 ($\Delta \chi^2(1) = 3.89$)	n/a	$5.19 > \Delta \chi^2(1) = 3.89$	$68.22 > \Delta \chi^2(1) = 3.89$
PCSR→BP	$\beta = .14$ ($t = 1.37$)	$\beta = .28(t = 3.40^{***})$	$\beta = .77$ ($t = 7.21^{***}$)
Direct relationship of PCSR→BP	Insignificant	Significant	Significant

Note: PCSR = perceived CSR; BA = brand attitude; BC = self-brand connection; BP = brand preference; *** $p < .001$.

PCSR exhibited the greatest factor loading with ethical ($\beta = .90$, $t = 12.41$, $p < .001$), economic ($\beta = .87$, $t = 12.45$, $p < .001$) and environmental dimensions ($\beta = .84$, $t = 11.79$, $p < .001$). This implies customers perceive the ethical dimension of CSR is the most influential factor to determine a company's CSR practices. In this study, although PCSR did not show a direct impact on customers' brand preferences, it exhibited a strong, indirect effect ($\beta = .65$, $t = 10.27$, $p < .001$). It makes sense to assume customers' PCSR is processed through customers' brand attitude and their self-connection phases developed to brand preference, rather than PCSR directly affects their brand preferences.

Among various sharing economy businesses, Uber, a ridesharing business, has been suffering from recovering its business reputation, value, and social recognition from the public, because of mismanagement of human resources and upper-level leader's illegal allegations (Carson, 2017). Uber's disreputable, denouncing cases have drawn people's attention to the firm's social responsibilities and led to the public's rebuttal to use Uber services. Revamping its original image as a socially responsible, innovative firm, Uber has established a new leadership team. Kolodinsky et al. (2010) found customers' positive attitudes toward corporate social activity could affect their perceptions and behaviors. Thus, CSR has been considered a firm's obligations to protect and enhance the welfare of society as a whole, along with the best interests of the firm (Davis and Blomstrom, 1975). In their study, Becker-Olsen et al. (2006) found 80% of the respondents believed firms should engage in socially responsible initiatives and 76% of the respondents thought these initiatives would benefit companies. This study suggests customers of profoundly popular ridesharing services expect companies to be involved in social initiatives and may be rewarded for their efforts through purchase behavior as Becker-Olsen et al. (2006) argued. When customers perceive a ridesharing service company implementing environmental, economic, and ethical CSR initiatives, their perceptions of the company appeared to positively influence their attitude towards the brand as well as self-connection to the brand. These findings suggest customers' PCSR practices are the key factors for a ridesharing service company to nurture positive customer brand attitudes and brand connection, which lead to customers' brand preferences.

5.2. Implications

This study developed a theoretical model that examined whether customers' perceptions of a ridesharing service firm's CSR practices influenced their attitudes and connected feelings toward the firm's brand and their brand preferences. Using second-order analysis to examine customers' PCSR, this study proved key dimensions of PCSR in defining relationships with customers' brand attitudes, brand connection, and brand preferences. In particular, this study assumed PCSR consisted of three major dimensions—environment, economy, and ethics. Each dimension affected the second-order construct of PCSR at a different level in the order of ethical, economic, and environmental dimensions ($\beta = .90$, $\beta = .87$, and $\beta = .84$), respectively. Moreover, this study provided a framework to explain how customers' PCSR of a firm affected their brand attitudes and self-connectedness toward the firm's brand, and, in turn, their preferences to the brand.

This framework will also assist management to help better

understand ridesharing customers' behaviors, based on their perceptions of these three dimensions of PCSR activities to establish their marketing strategies appropriately. Practically, the ridesharing firms must re-identify these three key activities of CSR practices, and place more weight on ethics, economy, and environment. Brand attitude and connection can be determined by customers' PCSR so ridesharing service companies should focus more on diverse CSR activities to enhance customer relationships. Findings from this study confirmed ethical practices were considered the most significant among three core factors comprising PCSR that predicted customers' attitudes and connections to the firm, which, in turn, derive their purchase intentions to the brand. As indicated in the case of Uber, one leading ridesharing service company (Carson, 2017), firms' unethical activities have made customers turn away and remain 'no transactions' until it fully revamps its image to the level of what customers want to experience. This proves corporate social responsibility practices influence not only images of a firm, but also its bottom line. Therefore, implementing CSR is no longer optional for firms, but is considered mandatory today. A firm can benefit from these findings by understanding how PCSR initiatives may enhance customers' attitudes and their connection toward the brand, and, in turn, increase customers' brand preferences.

5.3. Limitations and future study suggestions

This study is subject to several limitations. First, a convenience sampling method was adopted using a research firm's consumer panel. Therefore, caution is required in generalization and interpretation of this study's findings. Second, this study mainly focused on ridesharing service firms; it also requires caution when applying these findings to other sharing economy models. Third, this study identified three core PCSR dimensions reflected in customers' PCSR and three endogenous variables of customer behaviors. There should be additional variables included in the study model to embrace customer behavior widely. Brand preference was interchangeably used with purchase intention or behavioral intention in this study. There might be some gaps in defining the terms of variables.

By incorporating the limitations of this study, future research directions can be suggested. This study initially hypothesized the direct effect of PCSR on customers' brand preferences. However, a strong, indirect effect between PCSR and customers' brand preferences ($\beta = .65$, $t = 8.05$) has been indicated, based upon data analysis. Future study may incorporate either full or partial mediation effects of variables into the study's framework. Sharing economy has become a prolific business model today. This study model or similar can be tested with other sharing economy businesses to assess customer behaviors and its antecedents, such as ethics, environment, social, legal, and philanthropic dimensions of CSR, corporate image, and more. Also, ridesharing services are globally adopted today; it would be useful to test with a global sample to check cultural differences and other related aspects, such as nationality and geographic differences.

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