



Original Article

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Green Marketing Functions in Building Corporate Image in the Chain Store

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ABSTRACT: The main purpose of this research is to examine the role of consumer awareness of green marketing in corporate image and consumer purchase intention. The statistical population includes all the consumers who make purchases from the grocery store chains, such as Khooneh be Khooneh, in Babol city. Of this population, based on the Morgan's table, a sample of 384 persons was formed, the individual members of which were selected using simple random sampling. The actual data were collected by questionnaires. Using factor analysis and structural equation modeling (SEM) in SPSS and SmartPLS software, the assumed relationships between the variables were tested. The findings indicated that consumer awareness of corporate green marketing and social responsibility, product image, and company reputation (corporate image) had a positive and significant relationship with consumer purchase intention.

KEYWORDS: green marketing functions; corporate image; chain store

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1. INTRODUCTION

Today, considering the people's concerns about the disruption in the ecosystem and the environment and exploitation of natural resources, the world is faced with challenges for increased industry speed with a 'green' engine. As a consequence, consumers feel a greater social responsibility to the environment, which make them use energy more sparingly, purchase products with environmentally friendly labels, and care about the waste sorting and recycling (Haanpaa, 2007; Hartmann & Apaolaza Ibáñez, 2006). Along with business expansion to foreign lands, companies feel a greater need for creating a good image of themselves as a good and exemplary citizen who cares about the host country (Chapple & Moon, 2005). In the distant past, the industrial world at an increasing pace moved toward progress and tried to meet consumer needs. Perhaps no one imagined one day marketing, in addition to sales and profitability, would need to worry about the consumer and community health as well. Environmental concerns have considerably grown in recent years, although not in the distant years organizations imagined themselves in the right development and progress path by responding to the consumption market, creating facilitating systems, creating diversity in products and services, establishing relationships with customers, and other achievements. However, the high level of air pollution, low water quality, the pollution caused by car traffic, large amount of household and industrial wastes, fast depletion of non-renewable energy sources, ozone layer depletion, and the gradual global warming have raised many concerns and the leaders of the industrial world has to face the bitter reality that production, supply and consumption of industrial goods might ruin the planet earth. This eventually led to the introduction of the green marketing concept in the 1980s to cope with these problems. The significance of addressing environmental issues becomes clear when we realize that a movement towards sustainable development regardless of environment is impossible. There is an increasing concern and awareness today among human societies regarding their safety and welfare and the dangers of products for the environment (Lim & Yoo, & Kwak, 2009; Kim & Seol, 2007), giving rise to green marketing. Green consumption is the people's effort to protect themselves and their environment through purchase decisions and indicates consumer concern for the environment as a kind of social responsibility, and not as a legal requirement imposed by government or society. This new insight has led to changes in the choice of consumer products and their producers by consumers (Suplico, 2009). If sustainability is the key to success in the ever changing world of today, knowing how to remain sustainable will be the secret of victory. Sustainability is a dynamic, not static, concept which is realized through profound and strong interaction between organization and dynamic business environment. Sustainability does not occur overnight; it is resulted from a set of gradual changes and step-by-step efforts which are combined to achieve an accumulated and synthesized result. Sustainable change follows a predictable pattern of accumulation of resources and reserves which works out its way along with the mechanism of influence and progress. Meanwhile, the environment, in the world today, has become an integral part to all areas of human activities, including politics, economics, and culture. Green marketing dominates the current dynamic and volatile environment and opens a path towards business continuity and marketing role playing as a strategy (Park & Heo, 2007; Oh & Lee, 2004).

Consumers, too, are responsible for environmental issues and by purchasing green products contribute to this process. Although the reasons for their participation in green activities and the type of their commitment to the environment vary, the role of green consumers in protecting the environment is vital (Suplico, 2009, p. 173). These consumers avoid consumption of the products that their life and other people's life in danger, in the production process cause serious damage to environment, make excessive use



of energy, produce a lot of waste, and in the extraction of the required raw material do harm to the endangered plant and animal species (Lee, 2008, p. 575).

Therefore, in this research, we want to answer the question as to whether there is a significant relationship between green marketing and building the corporate image in a chain store.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Integrated management process has the responsibility for identifying, predicting and satisfying the needs of consumers and society at large (Do Paco & Raposo, 2009). Corporate social responsibility (CSR), from a traditional perspective, is a topic concerning the environment, human rights, labor force rights, consumer rights, and community rights (Shim, 2009; Rhee, Lee, & Cho, 2005; Sung, 2003). CSR extends to five areas: economic responsibility, social engagement, environment protection, social/cultural services, and consumer support. Product image refers to the mental image that consumers have of the product of a company or organization and is formed by the quality and reliability of the product offered by the company to the market and society, and the amount of the effort made by the company to satisfy consumers / customers (Ko, Hwang, & Kim, 2013). The concept of corporate image is a topic of interest to researchers and experts in the area of marketing management. Corporate image refers to the net result of the existing knowledge, beliefs, ideas, feelings or perceptions regarding an organization or company (Furman, 2010; Wan & Schell, 2007). Corporate image is a naturally combined product of various factors with which a company or organization can be identified. Purchase intention is the most important predicting factor of actual purchase behavior. Indeed, many studies have shown that corporate image has a significant effect on consumer purchase intention (Kang & Yang, 2010; David, Kline, & Dai, 2005).

Seyed Salehi and Kazemi (2015), in a research titled *Determinants of Consumer Selective Behavior in respect to Green Products based on the Theory of Consumption Values*, found that quality value, price value, social value, emotional value, conditional value, and cognitive value were the most important consumer perceived aspects. Sepahvand, Abbasi Nikoo and Namdaar Joveimi (2015), in a case study of Isfahan citizens, investigated the effect of green marketing mix on green consumer behavior and found that the stronger the presence of green marketing was, the more positive the consumer behavior and attitude to purchase became. Rafatpanah Bayegi (2015), in a research titled *Green Marketing and its Impact on Green Consumer Purchase Intention and Behavior*, reached the conclusion that differences appear in consumer behavior in societies which are intriguing. Haddadian, Vahidi Noghati, Pasban, and Davoudi (2014) investigated the effect of green marketing mix on green purchase and found a strong association between all green marketing mix components and green purchase. Suki, Suki, & Azman (2016), in a study titled *The Impacts of Corporate Social Responsibility on the Links between Green Marketing Awareness and Consumer Purchase Intentions*, observed that, the companies make their green marketing activities known to the publics by distributing eco-friendly fliers which helps to increase sales revenue, raise consumer awareness, and develop greater intention to purchase the products. Osman, Othman, Salahudin, & Abdullah (2016), in their study titled *The Awareness and Implementation of Green Concepts in Marketing Mix: A Case of Malaysia* found a significant relationship between management awareness of green concepts and implementation of green programs or activities in the firm. Giridon-Wilson and Mody, in a research on personality and older consumers' green behaviour in the UK, found that personality trait is positively linked with (consumer) of green behavior. Zuhaira and Noor Azman (2015) investigated the impact of green marketing strategy on firm's performance in Malaysia and concluded that despite the growing number of the consumers who are willing to use green products, green marketing is faced with challenges. Murin,

Marková, Zelený, & Jaduřová (2015), in a research titled *Green Marketing as a Tool Influencing Consumers' Behavior* in Slovakia, noted that strategies of sustainability and environmental ethics are currently a common and acceptable marketing advantage on the market. Fuentes (2014), in research titled *How Green Marketing Works: Practices, Materialities and Images*, suggested that green marketing can be usefully implemented applying a practice theory. Richey Jr, Musgrove, Gillison, Stephanie, & Gabler (2014) studied *The effects of environmental focus and program timing on green marketing performance and the moderating role of resource commitment* and drew the conclusion that employing the appropriate resources is necessary for success of any green innovation. Research in different countries indicates a growing concern among consumers for the environment changing gradually their behavior. Marketing experts consider marketing as one of the main factors giving rise to this issue. Marketing has, to some extent, contributed to and should be blamed for many environmentally undesirable and harmful practices in the world, which often arise from overconsumption. Green consumption is the people's effort to protect themselves and their environment through purchase decisions and indicates consumers' concern and care for the environment as a kind of social responsibility, and not a legal requirement imposed by law or society. This new attitude brought about changes in the choice of products and their producers or suppliers by consumers. This study contributes to the literature by providing evidence on the consumer perception and attitude regarding these issues and the degree of their sensitivity to them in the Iranian socio-economic and cultural context. A practical implication of the present research is that our findings gives insights into green marketing aspects and corporate image building which could be taken into consideration in marketing planning by the domestic firms operating in the retail market.

Thus, given the research purpose and the involved factors, the following hypotheses are proposed.

Hypothesis 1. *Consumer awareness of green marketing has an effect on corporate social responsibility.*

Hypothesis 2. *Consumer awareness of green marketing has an effect on product image.*

Hypothesis 3. *Consumer awareness of green marketing has an effect on corporate image.*

Hypothesis 4. *Corporate social responsibility has an effect on consumer purchase intention.*

Hypothesis 5. *Product image has an effect on consumer purchase intention.*

Hypothesis 6. *Corporate reputation has an effect on consumer purchase intention.*

Now, based on the above hypotheses, the research conceptual model is mapped as follows:

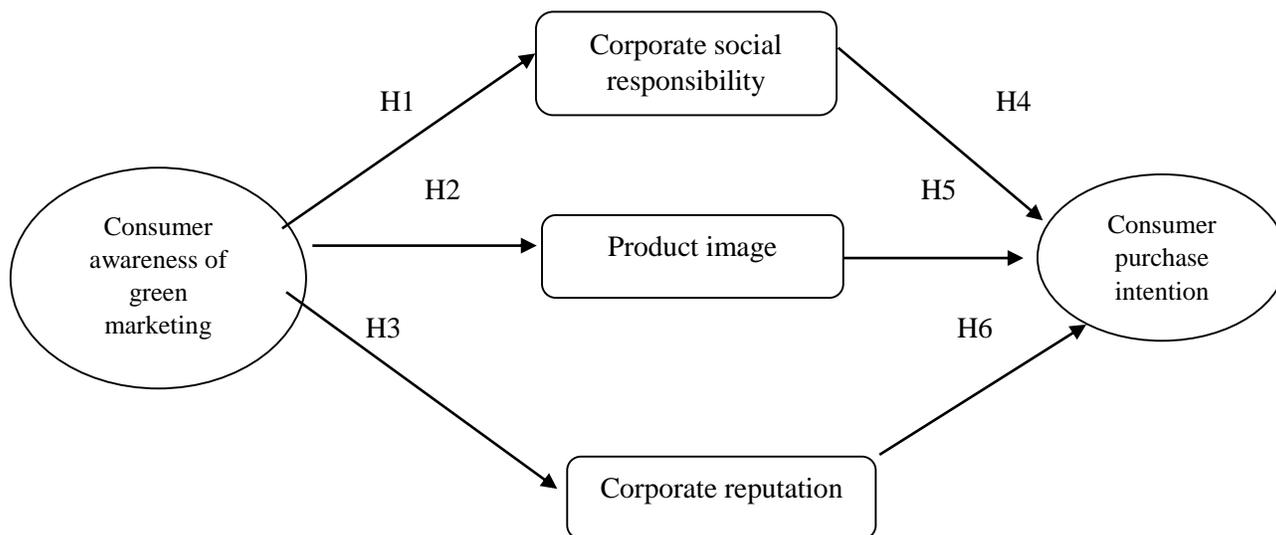


Figure 1. Research conceptual model (Ko et al, 2013)



3. METHODOLOGY

This is an applied research conducted through a descriptive survey. The statistical population include all the consumers that purchase from the supermarket chains (such as Khooneh be Khooneh) in Babol city. Given the infinite number of the statistical population, using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table, a sample consisting of 384 consumers was formed, the individual members of which were selected through simple random sampling. In sum, the required data for conduction of this research were collected by the following two methods:

1. Library research: in this method, for collection of the information on the literature and the research background, it was made use of the books, dissertations, articles, and databases.
2. Field study: in this method, the required data on the research subject were collected using questionnaire distributed among the sample respondents.

For measurement of the research variables, standard questionnaires were used.

Table 1. Items measuring each variable in the questionnaire

Variables	Items
Consumer awareness of green marketing	1, 2, 3, 4, & 5
Corporate social responsibility (CSR)	6, 7, 8, & 9
Product image	10, 11, & 12
Corporate image (reputation)	13 & 14
Consumer purchase intention	15, 16, & 17

Although the questionnaires used in this research were standard which itself was an indication to their sufficient validity, we took additional measures and handed them to the supervisors and the advisors who assessed and confirmed their validity. To assess reliability, a preliminary sample to the size of 25 questionnaires was pretested, and then based on the obtained data from the questionnaires and using Cronbach's alpha, the questionnaire's reliability was estimated. The obtained Cronbach's alpha for all variables was greater than the minimum acceptable value of 0.70 whereby the questionnaire's reliability was confirmed. For the test of the research hypotheses and the assumed relationships, structural equation modeling (SEM) technique in SmartPLS was used.

Reliability of the measurement model was examined using Cronbach's alphas, factor loadings, and composite reliability. Table 2 reports factor loadings for the questionnaire items. As is seen in this table, all the factor loadings of the items are greater than than the standard value of 0.4, which indicate their adequacy for measurement of the research variables.

Table 2. Factor loadings

Factor	Indicator (item)	factor loading
Consumer awareness of green marketing	AW1	0.893
	AW2	0.925
	AW3	0.905
	AW4	0.887
	AW5	0.769
Corporate social responsibility	CSR1	0.936
	CSR2	0.880
	CSR3	0.914
	CSR4	0.646
Product image	IMG1	0.905
	IMG2	0.873
	IMG3	0.881
Consumer purchase intention	INT1	0.963
	INT2	0.973
	INT3	0.983
Corporate reputation (image)	RP1	0.960
	RP2	0.942

According to the PLS algorithm for reliability analysis, following assessment of factor loadings, Cronbach's alphas and composite reliability (or construct reliability) are calculated. Table 3 presents the calculated Cronbach's alphas and CRs for the latent variables.

Table 3. Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability of latent variables

Latent variables	Symbol	Cronbach's alpha (alpha > 0.7)	Composite reliability (CR > 0.7)	Average variance extracted (AVA > 0.5)
Consumer awareness	AWR	0.924	0.943	0.770
Corporate social responsibility	CSR	0.869	0.912	0.725
Product image	IMG	0.865	0.917	0.786
Consumer purchase intention	INT	0.972	0.982	0.947
Corporate reputation	REP	0.894	0.949	0.904



As is seen in the above table, the alpha coefficients and the CRs for all the latent variables are above the threshold 0.7 which confirm reliability and internal consistency of the research scale and its subscales.

The validity of the measurement model is tested in terms of convergent validity and discriminant validity. As to convergent validity, which measures correlation of each construct with its items (indicators), we used the measure average variance extracted (AVE). As reported in the above table, the calculated AVE for all constructs is above the standard threshold 0.5, ensuring that the subscales are accurate enough in measuring their respective variables. For assessing discriminant validity, Fornell-Larcker (FL) criterion was used. According to this criterion, the square root of AVE should be more than the other correlation values among the latent variables. Since the diagonal element (square root of AVE) for each latent variable is greater than its correlation with other latent variables, discriminant validity of the model is also confirmed.

Table 4. Convergent and discriminant validity of the measurement model

Latent variables	Symbol	Consumer awareness	Corporate social resp.	Product image	Purchase intention	Corporate reputation
		AWR	CSR	IMG	INT	REP
Consumer awareness	AWR	0.877				
Corporate social resp.	CSR	0.240	0.852			
Product image	IMG	0.508	0.234	0.887		
Purchase intention	INT	0.364	0.306	0.533	0.973	
Corporate reputation	REP	0.464	0.165	0.433	0.465	0.951

To examine the structural model fit, R^2 coefficients for the endogenous latent variables were used. R^2 is a measure that shows the proportion of variation in an endogenous (outcome) variable is explained by an exogenous variable (covariate). It is evaluated based on three criterion values of 0.19, 0.33, and 0.67, representing a weak, moderate, and strong R^2 , respectively. Table 5 presents R^2 values for the endogenous variables.

Table 5. R^2 values for endogenous constructs

Latent variables	Symbol	R^2
Corporate social responsibility	AWR	0.057
Product image	IMG	0.259
Purchase intention	INT	0.380
Corporate reputation	REP	0.215

The R^2 values in the table above which lie within the range of 0.20 and 0.6, indicate that the structural model is relatively fit in predicting the values of the unobserved variables.



The model overall fit was examined using the goodness of fit (GOF) index, the obtained value for which is evaluated against three criterion values of 0.01, 0.25, and 0.36 marking weak, moderate, and strong fit levels, respectively. Table 6 reports the details on the model overall goodness of fit in light of the obtained values for R^2 and Community indices.

Table 6. R^2 and Community of the latent variables and the model GOF

Latent variables	R^2	Community
Consumer awareness		0.636
Corporate social responsibility	0.057	0.913
Product image	0.259	0.647
Purchase intention	0.380	0.665
Corporate reputation	0.215	0.582
Community	Average R^2	GOF
0.6886	0.22775	0.3960

Given the GOF value (0.3960) in the table above, the model overall fit is confirmed as well.

4. FINDINGS

In this section, we present the results on the test of the hypotheses in PLS software and discuss their implications. Diagrams 2 and 3 present the structural models in terms of factor loadings and significance levels.

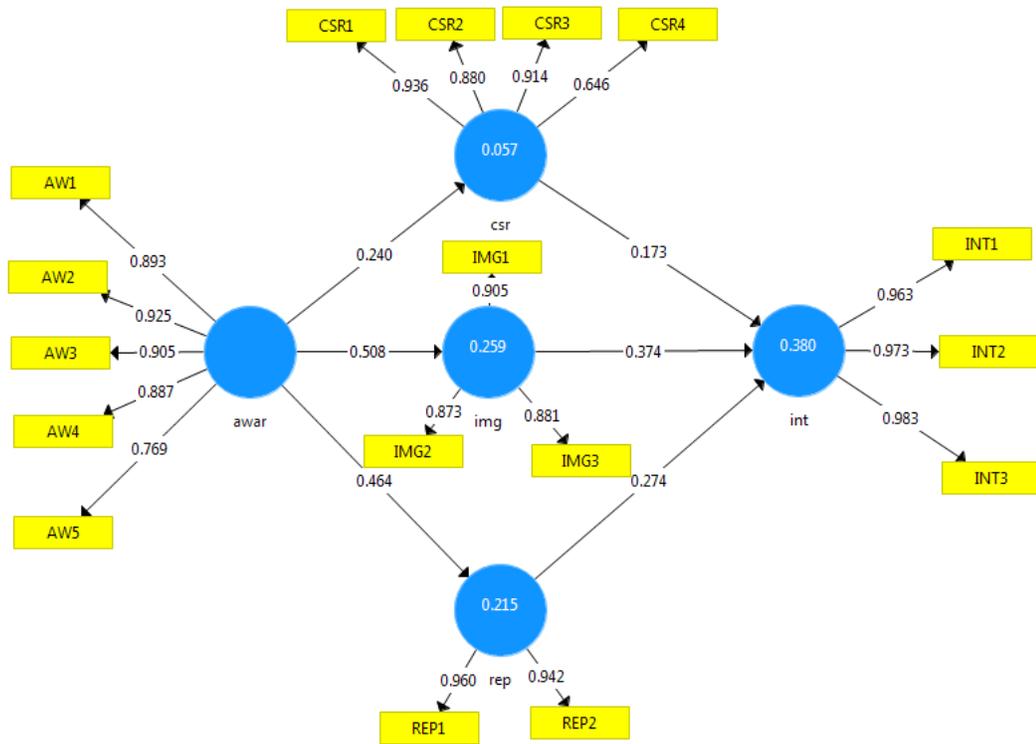


Figure 2. Structural model with factor loadings

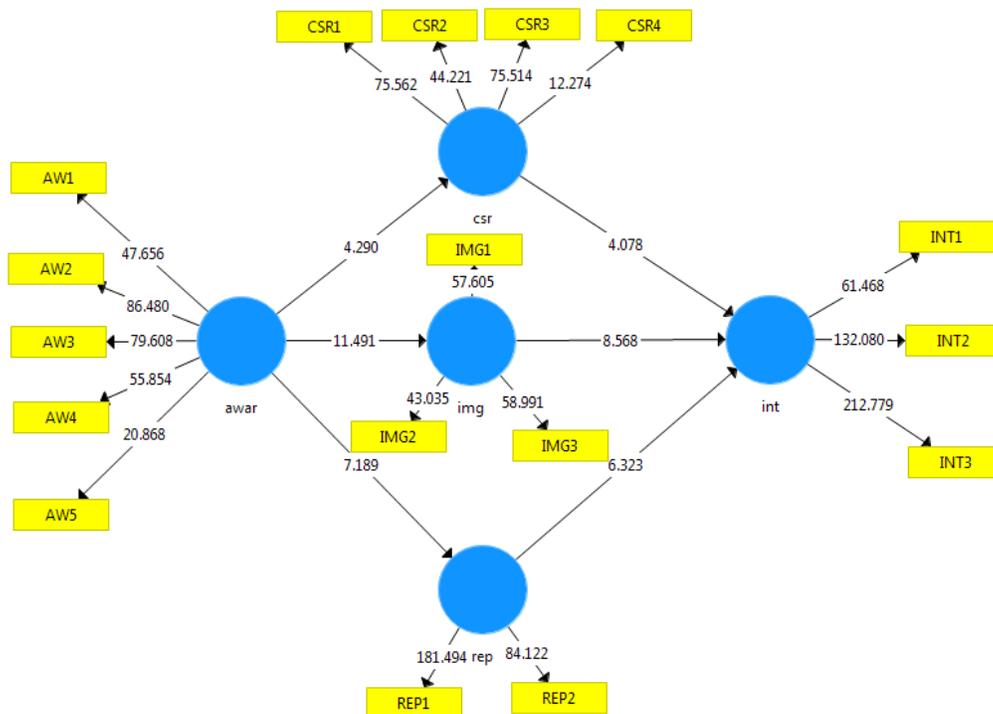


Figure 3. Structural model with significance coefficients

Given figures 2 and 3 and table 7, the standardized coefficient (path coefficient) for the variables consumer awareness of green marketing and corporate social responsibility ($\beta = 0.240$) and its significance ($t = 4.290$) which is above the standard value of 1.96 in absolute terms ($> |1.96|$), indicate that the relationship between the two variables is significant. As a result, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted. Therefore, the first hypothesis predicting a significant link between consumer awareness and CSR is confirmed.

The standardized coefficient (path coefficient) for the variables consumer awareness of green marketing and product image ($\beta = 0.508$) and its significance ($t = 11.491$) which is way above 1.96 in absolute terms ($> |1.96|$), indicate that the relationship between the two variables is significant. As a result, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted. Therefore, the second hypothesis assuming a significant link between consumer awareness and product image is confirmed.

Table 7. The results of the path analysis (path coefficients and significance values)

Hypothesis: Path	Abbreviation	Path coef. (β)	Significance (t-value)	Conclusion
H1: Consumer awareness => Social responsibility	AWR => CSR	0.240	4.290	Confirmed
H2: Consumer awareness => Product image	AWR => IMG	0.508	11.491	Confirmed
H3: Consumer awareness => Corporate reputation	AWR => REP	0.464	7.189	Confirmed
H4: Social responsibility => Purchase intention	CSR => INT	0.173	4.078	Confirmed
H5: Product image => Purchase intention	IMG => INT	0.374	5.568	Confirmed
H6: Corporate reputation => Purchase intention	REP => INT	0.274	6.323	Confirmed

The standardized coefficient (path coefficient) for the variables consumer awareness of green marketing and corporate reputation ($\beta = 0.464$) and its significance ($t = 7.189$) which is higher than 1.96 in absolute terms ($> |1.96|$), indicate that the relationship between the two variables is significant. As a result, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted. Therefore, the third hypothesis assuming a significant relationship between consumer awareness and corporate reputation is confirmed.

The standardized coefficient (path coefficient) for the variables corporate social responsibility and consumer purchase intention ($\beta = 0.173$) and its significance ($t = 4.078$) which is higher than 1.96 in absolute terms ($> |1.96|$), indicate a significant relationship between the two variables. As a result, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted. Hence, the fourth hypothesis that predicted a significant relationship between corporate social responsibility and consumer purchase intention is confirmed.

The standardized coefficient (beta) for the path from product image to consumer purchase intention ($\beta = 0.374$) and its significance ($t = 5.568$) which is higher than 1.96 in absolute terms ($> |1.96|$), indicate that the relationship between the two variables is significant. As a result, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted. Hence, the fifth hypothesis assuming a significant relationship between product image and consumer purchase intention can be confirmed.



The standardized coefficient (beta) for the path from corporate reputation to consumer purchase intention ($\beta = 0.274$) and its significance ($t = 6.323$) which is above 1.96 in absolute terms ($> |1.96|$), indicate that the relationship between the two variables is significant. As a result, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted. Therefore, the sixth hypothesis assuming a significant relationship between corporate reputation and consumer purchase intention can be confirmed.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Our results of the SEM path analysis for the first hypothesis are consistent with the findings of Suki et al (2016), Gordon-Wilson and Modi (2015), Fuentes (2014), Seyed Salehi and Kazemi (2015), and Rafatpanah Bayegi (2015). One explanation for the assumed effect of consumer awareness of green marketing on corporate social responsibility is given by referring to the positive and the significant relationship of consumer awareness of green marketing with consumer perception of corporate social responsibility, since consumers turn out to be sensitive to nature-friendly being of the firm's advertisement, the firm's use of green labels on products, and the programs pertaining to more and more green becoming of the firm's products and their environment- friendliness, making them perceive these instances as the corporate social responsibility.

The results of the SEM path analysis for the second hypothesis are in line with the results found by Sepahvand et al (2015), Haddadian et al (2014), Amirshahi et al (2013), Delafrouz et al (2012), Nakhaee and Kheiri (2012), Osman et al (2016), Zuhaira and Noor Azman (2015), Richey Jr et al (2014), and Moizer et al (2012). In explaining the hypothesis that consumer awareness of green marketing has an effect on product image, we may say that as the consumer awareness of green marketing increases, their perception (and attitude) regarding the image of the products and brands produced by the firm improves, and in their view, quality of the firm's products seems excellent and evaluate these products as reliable (trustable).

The results of the SEM path analysis for the third hypothesis converge with the findings of Suki et al (2016), Gordon-Wilson and Modi (2015), Zuhaira and Noor Azman (2015), Richey Jr et al (2014), Fuentes (2014), Seyed be Salehi and Kazemi (2015), Rafatpanah Bayegi (2015), Sepahvand et al (2015), and Haddadian et al (2014). In explaining the hypothesis that consumer awareness of green marketing has an effect on corporate reputation, we may say that as the consumer awareness of green marketing increases, their perception of the reputation that the company has in the market among the competitors improves so as they think that the company is able to compete on a national scale and consider its products of high quality and reliability.

The results of the SEM path analysis for the fourth hypothesis are in agreement with the results reported by Rafatpanah Bayegi (2015), Haddadian et al (2014), Amirshahi et al (2013), Delafrouz et al (2012), Alipour et al (2011), Zighami, Rezayee Vesal, Rezayee Vesal, & Assadi Davoudabadi (2009), Osman et al (2016), Murin et al (2015), Gordon-Wilson and Modi (2015), and Moizer et al (2012). In explaining the hypothesis that corporate social responsibility has an effect on purchase intention, we may say that when consumers perceive a firm to be highly engaged in CSR activities, they are more likely to procure their (desired) products from the outlets of that firm, if the product price and quality is more or less the same as those offered by other stores, and recommend the products of that firm to others.

The results of the SEM path analysis for the fifth hypothesis are in agreement with the results reported by Sepahvand et al (2015), Haddadian et al (2014), Amirshahi et al (2013), Delafrouz et al (2012), Nakhaee and Kheiri (2012), Osman et al (2016), Zuhaira and Noor Azman (2015), Richey Jr et al (2014), and Moizer et al (2012). The hypothesis that the firm's product image has an effect on consumer purchase intention



suggests that when the consumer perception of the product image is high, he/she will be more willing to purchase that product, and tend to consider the firm's product of higher quality, and have more confidence in and derive more satisfaction from (consumption of) that product. A high product image, as perceived by consumers, acts as a predictor of positive consumer behaviors in terms of purchase intention, so as those consumers with a high perception of corporate product image tend to recommend the company's product to others more frequently and rather procure it from the company's outlets, if the product price and quality is the same as those offered by the competitors.

Rafatpanah Bayegi (2015), Haddadian et al (2014), Amirshahi et al (2013), Delafrouz et al (2012), Alipour et al (2011), Zighami et al (2009), Osman et al (2016), Murin et al (2015), Gordon-Wilson and Modi (2015), and Moizer et al (2012), with similar results, support our finding in the test of the sixth hypothesis (i.e. significant association between corporate reputation and consumer purchase intention). This finding indicates that the higher the consumer perceived corporate reputation is, the more likely he/she is to purchase from that firm. In other words, a consumer who perceives a firm of high reputation tends to recommend the products of that firm to others more frequently, and would rather procure their sought items from the outlets of that firm.

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Authenticity of the texts, honesty and fidelity has been observed.

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Malihe Gholitabar and Mehdi Fallah Jelodar contributed to the design and implementation of the research, to the analysis of the results and to the writing of the manuscript.

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Author/s confirmed no conflict of interest.