LABOUR EXPLOITATION: A CASE OF CSR VOLATION IN PRIMARK

ABSTRACT

The paper examines the discrepancy between the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) statements and real-life application of labour practices in fast fashion companies through a case study of Primark. Although the company has been reporting widely publicised efforts to address labour exploitation through such initiatives as "Primark Cares," the brand is still being perceived as a labour abuser halting mainly in its supply chains. The study expounds on the impact of such contradictions on brand awareness, the trust of a stakeholder and customer loyalty (Tyler and Vachhani, 2021; Uddin *et al.* 2023).

Quantitative, positivist, and deductive approach to research was undertaken. The key data sources to be used in this research study are primary data obtained via the use of a Likert-based research questionnaire that will be carried out among the 64 employees of diverse levels in Primark. Regression, ANOVA, General Linear Modeling (GLM) are examples of statistical analyses that were carried out to test the relationships between CSR perceptions, labour ethics and brand outcomes.

The results also show that there is a high positive correlation between the implementation of CSR and brand reputation ($R^2 = .299$, $p = .001$), whilst there is a much stronger negative impact of labour exploitation on credibility of CSR ($R^2 = .789$, $p < .001$). csr was however found not to have a significant effect on customer lover ($p > 0.05$) indicating consumer scepticism and price sensitivity. Trust between stakeholders, nonetheless, showed a positive correlation with strategic CSR practices ($\eta^2 = .907$, $p = .012$).

The research adds to academia about CSR in ethically sensitive fields, suggesting the use of participatory means, open communication, and independent checks as the ways to harmonize corporate messages with ethical treatment of labour (Nahid-Ull-Islam *et al.* 2025; Zervoudi *et al.* 2025).

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Student ID:	23324741
Programme:	MAHRM **Year:** SEP-2024
Module:	Dissertation
Lecturer:	Rachel Ramirez
Submission Due Date:	15th August 2025
Project Title:	LABOUR EXPLOITATION: A CASE OF CSR VOLATION IN PRIMARK
Word Count:	19987 (Table of contents, list of figures, list of table, list appendices, list of abbreviations)

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

My profound gratitude goes out to Professor Rachel Ramirez, so much for continuous guidance, valuable advice, and constructive feedback during this research. Her competence, encouragement, and patience have been paramount to the realization of this dissertation.

My deepest thanks go to National College of Ireland for providing the academic resources, facilities, and learning environment that allowed me to carry out this study. I thank also those lecturers and fellow researchers and colleagues for their stimulating discussions, suggestions, and moral support during the conduct of this research.

Lastly, I dedicate this work to all those who have inspired me in the pursuit of knowledge and self-growth and whose support has laid the foundation upon which this achievement stands.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Full Term
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
GLM	General Linear Model
R²	Coefficient of Determination
α	Cronbach's Alpha (Reliability Coefficient)
η²re	Partial Eta Squared (Effect Size)
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
ESG	Environmental, Social, and Governance
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
ILO	International Labour Organization
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
BSR	Business for Social Responsibility
GRI	Global Reporting Initiative
ROI	Return on Investment

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

In a more globalising business world, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become one of the most influential strategies that companies have employed to show their ethical responsiveness, which is not limited to the factor of profitability. CSR involves the responsibilities of a company in regards to the social, ecological, and economic health of all its stakeholders, which, besides employees, customers, and suppliers, involves the residents of the environs (Ghanbarpour *et al.* 2024). Compliance with CSR in many enterprises, especially in those that, as the fashion retail industry, have complex supply chains, is a mixture of satisfying the ethical responsibility and creating the corporate image and competitive advantage.

Figure 1: Best Corporate Social Responsibility

(Source: echoVME Digital (2025) *Digital Marketing Agency in Chennai – Best Digital Company India*. Available at: https://echovme.in (Accessed: 14 August 2025).

Primark is one of the companies that is in question due to its fast-fashion operation, which is in the UK and is priced cheaply. Despite Primark having an image of a company that is committed to sustainability, ethical sourcing, and the power of workers (Corporate.primark.com, 2025), its operations have not taken place in a controversy-free manner. It has faced many allegations and reports of labour exploitation in its supply chains especially in the developing world. In another instance, Primark was criticized when there were rumours of garment workers in Myanmar secured in factories when they were on political

agitation and this posed some serious questions on whether the company upholds CSR values (Theguardian.com, 2021).

Considering this contradiction of communication and reality of corporations, there is a necessity to examine how Primark continues to profess that their CSR activities are contributing to social responsibilities but are doing no good. The importance of the conducted research is that it helps to inquire how labour exploitation signifies a violation of CSR as well as damages corporate reputation, stakeholder trust, and employee morale.

1.2 Justification for the Research

This research is timely and necessary because there are numerous reasons. On the one hand, social and ethical performance has become the determinant of corporate reputation, in particular, in the fashion industry, which is infamous due to its ruthless labour practices (Fatma & Khan, 2023). Transparency is a requirement by consumers and regulators, and firms are being held responsible for what practices undertaken by their suppliers. Therefore, systematic examination of the CSR procedures in the context of Primark can be discussed as an opportune issue of the investigation of ethical compliance.

Second, the phenomenon of labour exploitation in Primark is not an isolated one, as it is part of a bigger trend that can impact world supply chains. The realization of this dynamic gives insights as to why companies, in most cases, fail to observe or implement ethical practices within the supply network. The research does more than criticize the systems of CSR in existence, but examines the implications of such failures that influence brand recognition and employee motivation.

Third, most studies have looked at how reputation or consumer loyalty could be built through CSR programmes, whereas there is little research work on examining the ill effects of CSR transgressions, especially where the concept of labour exploitation negates and undermines CSR initiatives. This paper bridges that gap, given that it concentrates on the adverse effects of unethical labour practices on CSR credibility and any form of harm to corporate legitimacy.

1.3 Problem statement

There is less evidence between CSR violations and employee perceptions and internal stakeholder experiences, particularly in the fashion retail industry. Examples of the positive outcomes of the CSR tend to take up the most emphasis in studies instead of the negative effects of breaching the CSR (De Roeck *et al.* 2024). There is little research on the influence of labour

exploitation in a large-scale retailer on the CSR goals and the whole brand equity of the company.

Not enough data on employee-focused awareness, attitude, and direct experiences on the issues of CSR activities and labour treatment in fashion retail companies. This paper seeks to fill these gaps through the utilization of primary quantitative data that has been taken on employees at Primark to investigate their views on the practice of CSR compliance and labour practices. The addition of the first-hand data will provide practical information as to how well the CSR policies are operationalised in the company.

1.4 Research Aim and Objectives

This study seeks to address the paradox of the allege dC Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities of Primark and the exploitation of labour practices that are documented in its supply links. It aims at probing the extent to which such practices influence the brand recognition, customer loyalty, and the organization's relationship with the stakeholders. It will also establish the challenges Primark will be having in ensuring that its CSR objectives are constituted in adhering to ethical labour, as well as provide one or more measures that could enhance them. Finally, the study will help enhance the transparency of the role of CSR that can be realistically maintained in the global fashion retail business and the disadvantages of unethical business activity concerning its sustainability.

- To assess the influence of CSR implementation on Primark's brand recognition and reputation.

- To evaluate the relationship between CSR practices and customer loyalty in the fast fashion sector.

- To identify the effects of labour exploitation on CSR credibility and employee perception.

- To propose actionable CSR strategies that address labour exploitation while enhancing stakeholder trust.

1.5 Research Questions

To guide the research process, the following research questions have been framed:

1. To what extent does CSR implementation influence Primark's brand recognition and reputation?

2. How effective is CSR in enhancing customer loyalty and maintaining a strong customer base for Primark?

3. How do labour exploitation practices at Primark affect perceptions of CSR credibility?

4. What strategic recommendations can improve CSR effectiveness and reduce labour exploitation at Primark?

1.6 Research Hypotheses

Based on the objectives and research questions, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1$_0$ (Null): Effective CSR implementation does not significantly influence Primark's brand recognition and reputation.

H1$_a$ (Alternative): Effective CSR implementation positively influences Primark's brand recognition and reputation.

H2$_0$ (Null): Strong CSR initiatives do not contribute to customer loyalty or enhance the company's customer base.

H2$_a$ (Alternative): Strong CSR initiatives contribute to customer loyalty and enhance the company's customer base.

H3$_0$ (Null): Labour exploitation does not negatively affect employee perception or weaken CSR credibility.

H3$_a$ (Alternative): Labour exploitation negatively affects employee perception and weakens CSR credibility.

H4$_0$ (Null): Strategic anti-exploitation measures do not enhance stakeholder trust or improve CSR compliance.

H4$_a$ (Alternative): Strategic anti-exploitation measures enhance stakeholder trust and improve CSR compliance.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

This study incorporates three key theories to interpret the relationship between CSR and organisational outcomes:

Stakeholder Theory: Emphasises the fact that organisations have to consider the interests of all their stakeholders and not just those of shareholders (Mahajan *et al.* 2023). Disregard of

employee (more so the staff in factories) welfare goes against the idea of stakeholder involvement.

Shareholder Value Theory: It proposes that CSR could play a role in the maximisation of profits when it is chartered with the interests of the shareholders (Hayes, 2023). Nevertheless, the violation of CSR, such as labour exploitation, may lower the confidence of investors and profit-making.

Triple Bottom Line (TBL): Corporate performance against social, environmental and financial performance (Shim *et al.* 2021). Labour exploitation presents a perfect contrast to the "people" component of TBL, and the ultimate target of social responsibility is jeopardized.

Findings will be explained in line with these theories and how violations of CSR take place and affect different aspects of corporate strategy and relations with any of the stakeholders.

1.8 Methodological Overview

The research methodology is quantitative, based on primary data in the form of a structured survey of Primark employees. This way of doing the research can be explained by the necessity to accumulate the measurable data to test the research hypotheses and investigate the real working conditions and the employee perception of CSR and labour practices. Since the survey will be done with the help of a Likert-scale questionnaire, it will be possible to perform statistical analysis to determine the trends and interrelations between CSR practices and stakeholder reactions.

It will be presented by using a positivist philosophical position and a deductive approach that will allow the structured analysis of the problem. The descriptive research design is an opportunity to provide detailed profiling of employee attitude and organisational practices.

1.9 Organisation of the Study

The dissertation is structured as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction – Gives the background, rationale, research gap, aims, objectives, questions, and hypotheses as well as the structure of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review – States the theoretical views and past empirical researches on CSR, brand reputation, consumer loyalty and labour exploitation in fashion retail.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology –Describes philosophical position, research methodology, research design, data collection procedures, sampling and ethical issues.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings – Gives the outcome of the employee surveys and statistical analysis of their responses to perceptions about CSR and labour treatment.

Chapter 5: Discussion – Interprets results with respect to the available literature and theories, states implications and integrates the research hypotheses.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations – Draws main conclusions, contains practical suggestions to Primark and other types of retailing, and indicates the fields to be researched in the future.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The chapter reviews the current sources on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in connection with the fast fashion industry, with specific attention given to the activities of Primark. The review goes deeper in exploring the inherent paradoxes in the messaging of CSR and the practices within the operations, determining the understanding of how brands manage to respect the stakeholder expectations and the nature of business models that rely on profits. This chapter provides the structure of comprehension of the mismatch between CSR promises and real labour outcomes in fast fashion retail through the analysis of both empirical studies and theoretical approaches, as well as an individual critique of the case.

2.2 Empirical studies

2.2.1 Corporate Social Responsibility in Fast Fashion Retail

One of the most important strategic positionings in the global fashion industry is Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), whose programs are often questioned in the fast fashion sector about their impacts on the environment and society. Dal Mas *et al.* (2022) argue that CSR within the retail sector is multidimensional and covers environment-related efforts (e.g., sustainable sourcing) and ethical work, as well as social responsibilities. Such dimensions are usually embedded in corporate narratives, although this issue is not presented equally in fast fashion companies.

Figure 2: Corporate Social Responsibility in Fashion Industry

(Source: https://www.researchgate.net)

Fast fashion is widely criticized because the industry is profit-driven at the expense of morality. Retailers such as Primark are often put in the centre of this discussion as they have low-end business models and global outsourcing strategies. Fares *et al.* (2024) introduce a model that incorporates CSR in the multi-tiered distribution network in fast fashion and point out that, despite the existing theoretical frameworks about managing supply chains ethically in theory, in reality, the efficiency and speed of distribution hinder the possibility of its application. This implies the incompatibility of CSR undertakings and the structural requirements of fast fashion business patterns.

According to the stakeholder theory, organisations are required to consider the interests of all the parties that are involved in their activities, such as workers, suppliers, and consumers. Jones (2025) considers that UK retailers have done a commendable job so far towards appreciating CSR as an element of brand sustainability, but the real congruence between stakeholder expectations and corporate conduct is merely on the surface. Notable in this is the case of Primark: aside from promoting an image of ethical care with the help of projects like its Primark Cares programme, many reports still note the coercive nature of its supply chains.

The study by Donegan (2022) analyses consumer behaviour concerning CSR fundamentally regarding CSR claims, where, although younger consumers indicate an interest ethically, the purchasing decision is nonetheless ruled by cost and fashion. This observation implies that the short-term economic motivation among players of fast fashion brands to internally overhaul supply networks is limited, since the rise of awareness among consumers has not deteriorated into steadfast behavioural change.

A conflict between profitability and authenticity of CSR involvement is a theme repeated in the literature. Fast fashion runs on economies of scale, just-in-time manufacturing, and cost-cutting to the kill, which are not conditions that lend themselves well to sustainability and ethics (Yadav and Verma, 2025). Top brands such as Primark have committed to their environmental impact activities and increasing transparency in their supply chain, but the level of activity is usually low, and the chain activities are short-sighted.

Furthermore, the aspect of regulation enforcement is usually amiss in CSR in fast fashion. Dal Mas *et al.* (2022) emphasize that, due to the voluntary quality of CSR reporting, selective

disclosure occurs, and the firms have an opportunity to conceal troubling activities behind general statements or measures that cannot be independently verified. This reduces the powers of stakeholders to account to companies.

2.2.2 Labour Exploitation in Global Supply Chains

Fast fashion companies, such as Primark, are still linked to laboratory-exploitation practices, despite their published ethics about ethical sourcing and transparent, fair labour practices. This inconsistency between the CSR discourses and realities on the ground brings important doubts regarding the corporate responsibility frameworks. The report by Uddin *et al.* (2023) thoroughly demonstrates that there are still significant and systemic shortcomings in the observance of the rights of workers in global clothing supply chains, as activities aimed at addressing them within the framework of CSR are still more the result of risk management than ethical commitments.

The imbalances of power in the supply chain realized in fast fashion are extended on by Anner (2022). According to his analysis, brands still exercise an inappropriate power over their pricing and the scheduling of deliveries, which amounts to setting their terms on the suppliers that work on tight margins. As demonstrated by Anner, the configuration of the international apparel market is designed so that the brands cannot be subjected to legal responsibility, but the risks are distributed over the weak stakeholders, such as reputational, legal, and material losses. The latter is a systemic problem that devalues CSR promises, as they are not binding and cannot be related to how the operations of companies are conducted.

Additionally, COVID-19 pandemic was a test of the authenticity of CSR. According to the protest expressed by Tyler and Vachhani (2021), in an article criticizing Primark's inclusion policies, most of these face-value initiatives are formal, but do not have a substantive impact. In their analysis, CSR has been provided as a type of corporate theatre that simply props the view of ethical activity but fails at dwelling on institutionalised exploitation. In the example of Primark, the gap between the inclusive branding with which it presents images of itself to the world and the openness of its labour practices is part of a wider trend within the fast fashion industry toward performative responsibility.

Nevertheless, brands still release their CSR reports, which contain cheerful language and one-sided information. To make CSR stop endlessly talking and start walking, Ahmed *et al.* (2023) emphasize legally binding arrangements and increased transparency. They insist on

transformations in industries in general, particularly incorporating greater traceability, protection of suppliers, and effective grievance mechanisms by employees.

2.2.3 CSR and Brand Image, Reputation, and Equity

New interest in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has emerged as an influential force behind brand image and corporate reputation, particularly in industries that face ethical skepticism, i.e., fast fashion. Galvez-Sanchez *et al.* (2024) point to the fact of such influence of CSR on three significant aspects of the intangible capital of a brand, including brand equity, corporate reputation, and willingness to pay by consumers. Their experience in the fashion sector implies that socially responsible business practices are positively connected in the mind of consumers with high brand status, which frequently translates into brand restraint and strengthens positioning power. Nonetheless, such a relationship depends on perceived authenticity of CSR efforts.

Figure 3: Brand from CSR perspective

(Source: https://jcsr.springeropen.com)

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The gap between perception and practice can pose a problem to such associations, especially in the case of Primark and other fast fashion outlets. Quiles-Soler *et al.* (2023) critically look at the communication of CSR over social media and corporate websites. The authors believe that the digital manifestation of sustainability sometimes lacks transparency and operational specifics, with a focus on the sentimental narrative and the visuals that are friendly to the brands. Although such positioning is effective in building a favorable brand sentiment, it frequently runs close to what the scholars and activists refer to as greenwashing, the act of exaggerating or falsifying environmentally or socially responsible activities.

The problem of greenwashing is also covered thoroughly by Zervoudi *et al.* (2025), and the researchers offer a literature review on how CSR failures relate to the larger ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) discussion. In their argument, they notice that greenwashing emerges due to the pressures that systems feel to look ethical without going through any real reform. Through their research, they find out that corporations tend to selectively report CSR metrics, or leave out bad data, or report banal terms to conceal existing unethical business practices, particularly in their supply chains. The reputation repercussions can be very high when these practices are revealed, as stakeholders' trust is greatly damaged.

Additional criticism is provided by Nahid-Ull-Islam *et al.* (2025) as the authors not only comment on greenwashing but also refer to a new phenomenon of blue washing, when the companies merely capitalize on social justice rhetoric (e.g., inclusion, diversity) but do not implement any institutional change. They claim that CSR is one of the resources that are used by fashion companies such as Primark to act as a shield against criticism, which is frequently applied to avert public outrage or government intervention (Crapa, Roma and Bruccoleri, 2025). But consumers are increasingly gaining awareness of these ploys, and the long-term effect on the brand can be devastating when the CSR messages, upon inspection by consumers, are considered misleading.

Literature examples of such cases are described in the case study presented by Obadia (2023) regarding the reaction of Primark to the initiative of the European Union on environmental advertising named the Green Claims Directive. The research proves that the CSR message promoted by Primark was not strongly supported with evidence as the command requires, and there is a strategic disconnection between the external statements used by the company and its internal operations.

Mickelsson *et al.* (2023) continue the story by writing about wrinkles in CSR storytelling. They claim that inconsistencies in internal CSR objectives and external messages may lead to vulnerability of a brand, especially of service-based fashion companies. According to the study, the CSR statements need to be made on the same platform and by the same department so that they can stay true. It is when the mismatches happen that stakeholders, and particularly those younger and more socially conscious consumers, are quick to point out and condemn the mismatch.

2.2.4 CSR and Consumer Behaviour: Loyalty and Purchase Intentions

The role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) that affects consumer behaviour is a very important subject of investigation in fast fashion, where the price and the ethics clash. More often, customers, particularly Millennials and Gen X, require businesses to practice socially and environmentally accountable activities. Cuesta-Valiño *et al.* (2024) address the issue of this dynamic by investigating how CSR influences consumer engagement with a brand and brand intention to buy. They establish a positive relationship between perceived CSR commitment and the willingness of consumers to interact with the brand on the emotional and behavioural levels. In cases where brands are perceived to be ethical, consumers can develop a strong bond and buy their products repeatedly.

Blazquez-Resino *et al.* (2025) further relate this fact in their argument that CSR greatly influences the development of customer brand identification, which is a psychological effect in which consumers recognize their values echoed in the brand. This is particularly relevant in the fast fashion with any ethical congruency with the brand being something that provides long-term commitment, even where the market is full of similar deals. According to their research, consumers form a greater sense of belonging (and advocacy) when they feel a brand is responsible, especially regarding its labour practices and environmental sustainability behaviours, and this turns into brand loyalty and repeat purchases.

The truth about the power of CSR is not homogeneous. In the case study of Primark, Ologunebi (2023) explores the usefulness of CSR as a customer retention initiative in online shopping in the fashion industry. According to the study, although CSR stories can result in purchase intentions, they cannot, on most occasions, be relied upon to keep customers where they have not been supplemented with product quality, convenience, and value for money. This realization shows a multifaceted consumer purchasing decision-making process, in which CSR is neither a factor, but an important one nonetheless.

Sharabati *et al.* (2023) coined the term consumer consciousness, which is a moderating factor between the CSR and consumer behaviour association. According to their research, ethically conscious consumers are likely to be provoked by the CSR activities in the apparel industry at the time when the communication is transparent and consistent. The less informed consumers, on the other hand, might not care about the ethical status of a brand, but their priorities are the price or what is fashionable. This implies that the direction to focus on in developing CSR strategies will have to be customized to various segments of consumers, especially when the company is trying to enter markets with varying ethical sensitivity.

An important dimension in this process of consumer and brand is trust. When customers think that CSR-related statements are either insincere or are but a greenwashing campaign, they may lose their loyalty overnight (Silvennoinen, 2022). This was clear after some fashion brands, such as Primark, faced backlash after the media publicized cases of poor labour conditions. Whenever investigative studies or anonymous sources of information reveal the CSR claims of a brand to be false, then consumers will drop out of the brand, not only but also the product category of which the brand is a part, leading to ripple effects across the industry.

Moreover, the loyalty that is caused by CSR seems to be more sustainable in case it is established based on long-term experiences, rather than single campaigns. Cuesta-Valiño *et al.* (2024) emphasize that recurrent encountering of plausible CSR campaigns may induce cognitive consistency among consumers, upbuilding brand confidence and emotional commitment. This brings to focus the significance of consistency in moral branding activities. The companies in fashion must hence incorporate CSR into their major business activities and not leave it in the annual reports or in separate marketing events.

2.2.5 CSR Communication and Transparency Challenges

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the fast fashion industry is extremely effective and has succeeded in situations where it is communicated to the stakeholders, besides its implementation (Cui and Fan, 2021). Although companies such as Primark have embraced various communication platforms in order to voice their CSR policies, the issue of transparency and authenticity keeps haunting such initiatives. The gap between what is written and what transpires has been another recurrent criticism of the literature, which reveals CSR as more of a spectacle than a revolution in most cases.

Al-Hilw (2025) evaluates the sustainability reporting process in the fast fashion industry critically and concludes that the approach of selective disclosure is very common in this

industry. The paper outlines that brands publish glossy, full-of-data sustainability reports, but the data doesn't necessarily contain depth or third-party evaluation and may not even have a basis to make comparisons. Such reports, which are formulated in a form that resembles more of branding than a check and balance structure, do not help much when the stakeholders seek real ethical improvement. As an example, even Primark's own CSR reports include challenging initiatives to minimize carbon footprints and utilize sustainable cotton, but fail to mention the workings of the supply network or the manner the workers will be treated, which the brand has had past problems with due to public scrutiny.
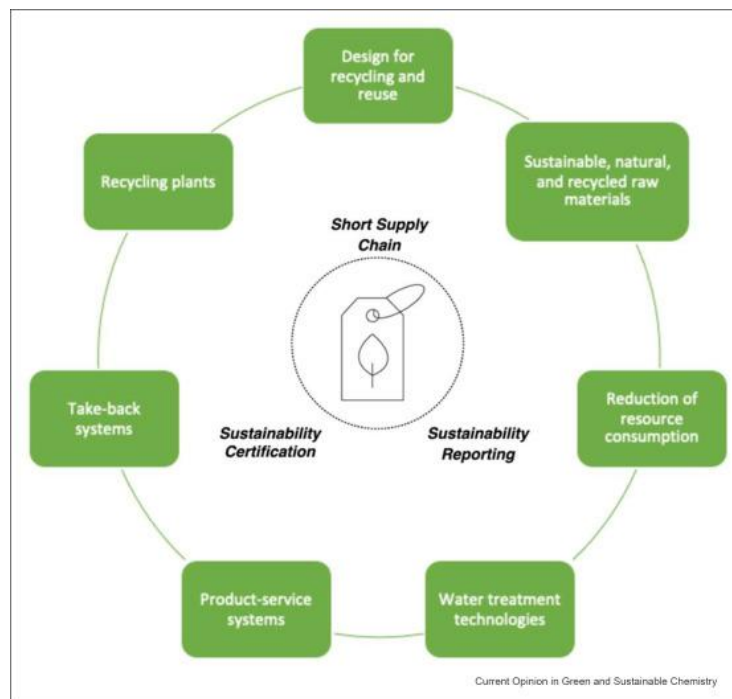
Figure 4: Circular slow fashion model

(Source: https://www.sciencedirect.com)

The article by Quiles-Soler *et al.* (2023) investigates the media of digital platform usage (specifically social media and corporate websites) as objects of CSR information. In their analysis, they reveal that the fashion businesses are gravitating towards emotionally appealing narrations that resonate with the values of the customers, which include inclusivity, diversity, and environmental compassion. Nevertheless, this method is usually not empirical and lacks such signs of criticality as the number of working hours in the factory, staff turnover, or whistleblowing initiatives. This superficiality leads to gaps in credibility, as initially consumers can be convinced via messaging, but then feel cheated by brand claims that can be proven wrong, instead of media apply on investigations or NGO reports regarding a brand. Similarly,

in the instance of Primark, its Primark Cares project campaign has been highly marketed on the internet, yet there have been attempts to doubt its authenticity, as this brand had previously been associated with ill practices of labour exploitation (Kurt and Yolaçan, 2024).

Greco (2023) refers to this problem through the lens of discourse analysis, which revolves around the breaking down of CSR claims by activists on social media, such as Twitter. The paper demonstrates that the metacommunicative practice of CSR in fast fashion is usually challenged by subdiscussions, or chains of comments, which doubt brand integrity and reveal its inconsistencies. These subdiscussions work particularly well in weakening corporate mascars since they are grassroots-driven and publicly available. The results of Greco studies indicate that, today, CSR transparency stops being a process of top-to-bottom imposed by brands and turns into a dialogue among consumers, activists, and civil society.

The new problem is that brands are trying to take control over the narrative, but they are not giving stakeholders any significant access to raw or untouched data. According to Al-Hilw (2025), even the communication on sustainability will turn into a smoke screen instead of being a harbinger of change unless there is some mechanism of control over it (by third-party audits or with governmental assistance). Moreover, visual images, hashtags, and slogans are also used strategically to enable the brand to produce an ethical appeal without an actual alteration of their business operation (Kumar, Qiu and Kumar, 2022). Such alienation destroys the trust of stakeholders in the long run, as well as damages reputation in case of exposure.

The effectiveness of CSR communication undergoes further trial when it comes to a crisis. As an example, several fast fashion companies, including Primark, were blamed for leaving suppliers and scrapping orders during the COVID-19 pandemic, which served as the direct opposite of their CSR promotion (Islam *et al.* 2023). Even though there were large-scale online campaigns advocating solidarity and care, the absence of brands revealed the shakiness of their ethical responsibility under the pressures of economic constraints.

Companies that want to establish and preserve trust in their relationship with consumers need to incorporate transparency into all aspects of CSR practice, including supply chain mapping and factory visits to fair labour policies and impact measures. Following the ideas of Greco (2023) and Quiles-Soler *et al.* (2023), CSR communication must be transformed into a two-way and verifiable communication with the stakeholders instead of branding. Failing to do so, brands face a risk of succumbing to so-called ethical posturing, an unsustainable practice in the market where consumer awareness and digital activism are fast becoming rampant.

2.2.6 Primark-Specific CSR Critiques and Case Studies

Being the fastest-growing fast fashion company in the whole world, Primark has always ensured that it portrays itself as a socially conscious company with its PrimarkCares program and other sustainability commitments. Nevertheless, an increasing amount of scholarly and analytical literature reveals a more negative perspective on the laser-fit of its CSR, which implies that the company has been doing little to bridge the gap between its publicly stated principles and its actions. This segment explores these discrepancies in the form of certain case studies and critical analysis.
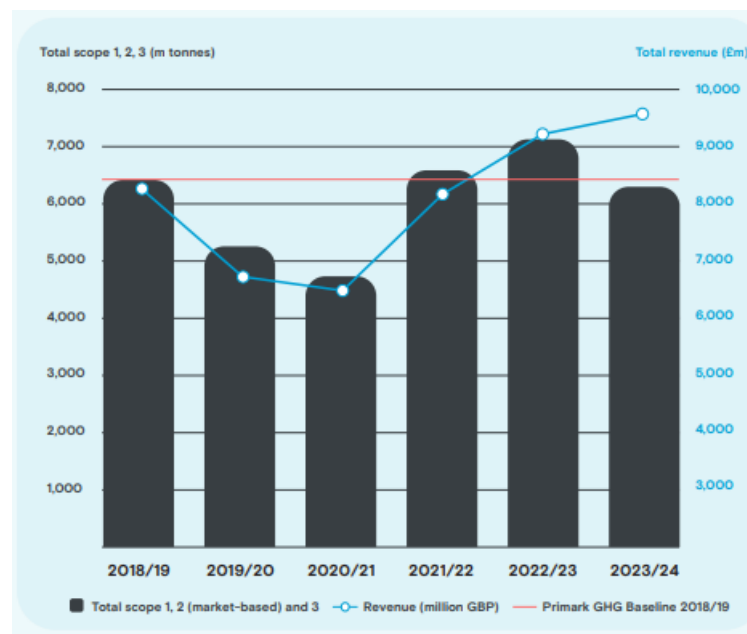
Figure 5: Primark's CSR

(Source: https://primark.a.bigcontent.io)

Tyler and Vachhani (2021) take a closer look at inclusion rhetoric at Primark, claiming that the company tries to focus on diversity and fairness mostly symbolically. Their study will use the recognition-based critique to discuss the ways in which Primark adopts inclusive words in its language and its attempts to come out as progressive, with structural inequalities in its labour practices still unsolved. The authors argue that this wobbly dedication to inclusion is just performative, and it is more like a reputation blanket than a guide to transforming the university institutional landscape. Of note is that the study focuses on the issue of internal contradictions; Primark is associated with the idea of empowerment through branding, whereas the practice of outsourcing labour forces workers, more often women in the factory in the Global South, into relationships of exploitation.

Obadia (2023) compounds this doubt, this time in legal and policy-oriented aspects. This paper evaluated how Primark has reacted to the Green Claims Directive proposals of the European Union, which aims at regulating green marketing claims as well as avoiding greenwashing. Obadia unravels that the environmental communication strategies of Primark do not comply with the requirements in the directive, emphasizing general terms and unsound data. This has indicated that the discourse applied by Primark on CSR may be inconsistent with the changing regulatory environment, which may create a legal and reputational threat. In addition to this, the paper contends that such a failure may hamper Primark to settle the change of a sustainable brand in the rising conscious marketplaces.

Mickelsson *et al.* (2023) review the rhetoric of CSR in the fast fashion industry and provide the analyzing of the gap between CSR and operational reality. In their research, they have defined the trend related to mis-matched agendas regarding the CSR strategy of Primark because marketing discourses and corporate goal do not meet the demands of ethical stakeholders. This incongruence also known as wrinkles in a CSR story forms cognitive dissonance to the consumers most of whom are those who are morally woke and tech-savvy. The authors warn that, until brands can overcome the structural obstacles to moral overhaul, which include supply chain opaqueness, cost pressure and low wage systems, the CSR discourse will do nothing other than promote the cynicism of stakeholders.

The other important problem that has been seen is non- inclusive consultation with the affected stakeholders. Although Primark has been investing in CSR reporting and in social media campaigns, historically, the retailer has been secretive with regard to the conditions in supply chain and results of the third-party auditing (Hendriksz. V., 2017). Such deliberate concealing of strategies renders the ethical claims impervious to validation by watchdogs and consumers which further undermines the CSR credibility of the brand.

2.3 Theories and Models

In critically evaluating this aspect of CSR, labour exploitation and brand perception in the case of the Primark, the study relies on a synthesis between a set of well-established theories and models. These systems offer analytical frameworks to interpret stake holders behaviours, business objectives, and contradictions in the fast fashion CSR practices.

2.3.1 Stakeholder Theory

The stakeholder theory states that company duties do not only cover shareholders but all the other parties impacted by the activities of the company workers, clients, suppliers, societies, and regulators. Stakeholder theory is great in grasping the role of CSR initiatives in Primark, as it strives to meet the demands of consumers who want to buy ethical fashion, workers who want to have fair labour terms, and investors who anticipate profits (Mahajan *et al.* 2023). At the same time, the theory also exposes the conflict between these interests. As an example, by implementing CSR campaigns like the Primark Cares, the company probably aims to satisfy consumers as the stakeholders, but disregarding the supplier-side stakeholders, that is, garment workers who are exposed to poor working conditions. The theory aids in analysing the selective fulfillment of groups of stakeholders in CSR communication depending on the priorities of the brand.
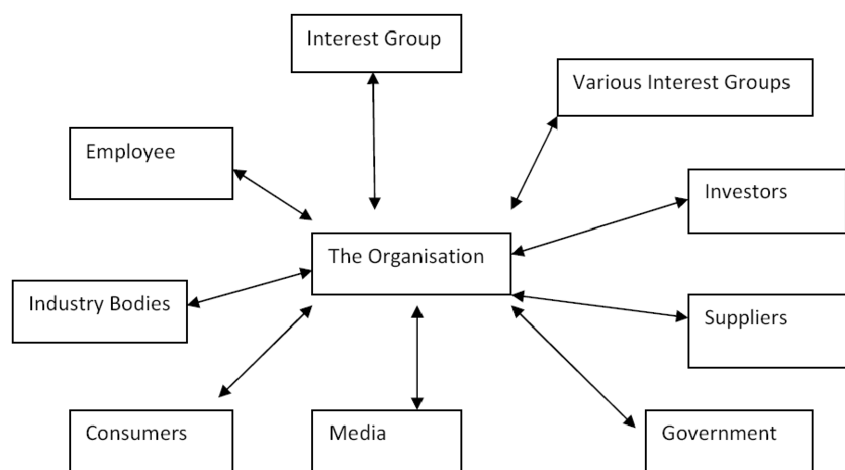
Figure 6: Stakeholder Theory

(Source: https://www.researchgate.net)

The stakeholder theory will be applied in this research to answer the question of which stakeholder interests the Primark approaches take the lead in its CSR approaches and how the commissive of particular stakeholders (e.g., workers) can hurt brand equity and trust. Although stakeholder theory addresses the importance of inclusiveness, there are companies like Primark whose selective stakeholder engagements promote the interests of consumers and investors at the expense of marginalized internal stakeholders like the garment workers. The lack of balanced stakeholder consideration in this theory is defeated by the asymmetry of power in global supply chains, where workers are not represented or influential rather held at par with the stakeholders.

2.3.2 Triple Bottom Line

The Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework puts forward the idea that organisations ought to be evaluated according to three areas of performance, namely People (social), Planet (environmental), and Profit (economic). Although numerous fashion businesses, including Primark, have adopted this framework in the reporting of their sustainability performance, the balance among the three pillars is, in most cases, skewed (Khan, Ahmad, and Majava, 2021). As an example, Primark offers its customers a promise of lower prices that may interfere with the objectives of social sustainability (decent salaries, hazard-free environment) and environmental sustainability (low-impact sourcing). The TBL system also enables scholars to ask whether the company really does incorporate all three aspects or whether it only emphasizes the cheapest ones (usually just green efforts that are the easiest to sell).

Figure 7: Triple Bottom Line

(Source: https://www.researchgate.net)

This paradigm can be discussed as especially effective in the critical analysis of how Primark manages to align its business model with the TBL framework and whether it makes trade-offs or contradictions. Although the TBL framework aims to achieve an equal balance between profit, people, and the planet, in practice, in fast fashion, in practice, economic and environmental components are prioritized, and social justice issues are pushed aside, including

the income issues translation in fair wages. Another issue that is quite important to mention is that a major drawback of TBL is putting it in danger of a superficial approach, with firms such as Primark littering the numbers of environmental indicators without the slightest consideration of the life stories of underpaid laborers, decreasing the paradigm to mere compliance assessment.

2.3.3 Legitimacy Theory

Following the legitimacy theory, corporations need to be regarded by society and ensure that they remain legitimate in their eyes through matching their undertakings with social values and expectations at large. CSR, in its turn, serves as the legitimacy-seeking instrument in this sense, at least, in those industries that can face ethical criticism, including fast fashion (Martens and Bui, 2023). In the case of Primark, these CSR activities will aid in enhancing their legitimacy by publicly displaying to match on sustainability and human rights values. But when this legality finds its way to the streets, when it comes to actual practice, which allows some behaviours like exploitation of labour or obscure reporting, the beneficial effect of promoting this appraisal during CSR messaging could be easily and quickly destroyed.
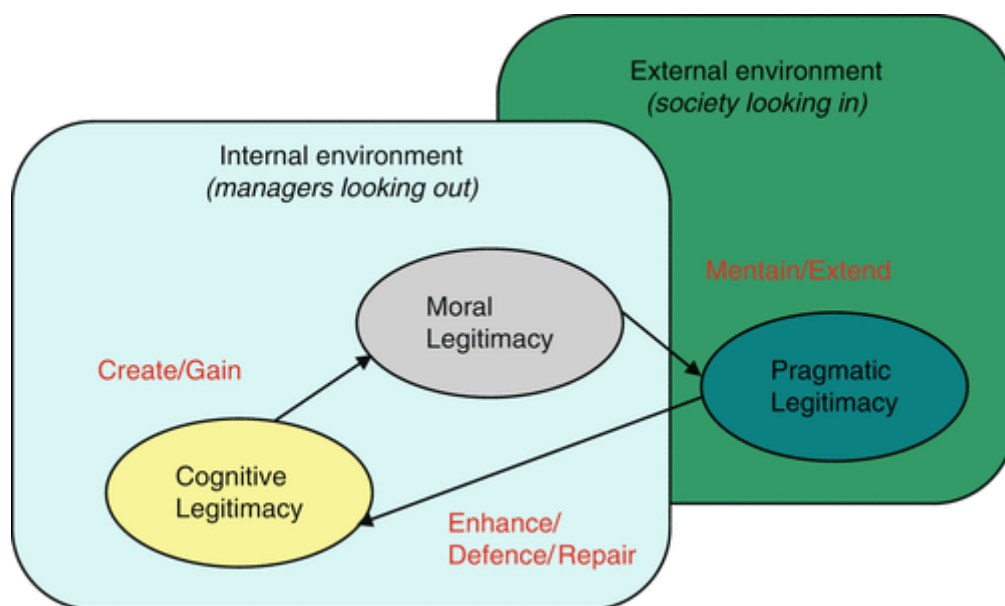
Figure 8: Legitimacy Theory

(Source: https://media.springernature.com)

The present study applies a theory of legitimacy to discuss how the company of Primark maintains its legitimate reputation by representing the CSR-related narratives and how the crises (labour scandals or greenwashing allegations) influence its legitimacy capital. According

to the legitimacy theory, conforming to societal expectations is the surety that stakeholders will trust, but the theory ignores the short-term reputational benefits that CSR marketing creates to cover the ill actions taking place. The theory fails to explain how performative CSR, commonly used by the fast fashion brands subject to this case, can cause the company to lose its legitimacy when the inconsistencies come to light due to either whistleblowers or media exposure.

2.3.4 Attribution Theory

The attribution theory focuses on how people attribute the reasons behind corporate behaviour. When applied in CSR situations, it is usually applied to determine whether consumers believe that CSR initiatives are done out of strategic reasons (extrinsic motivation) or out of intrinsic motives (genuine ones). This image affects the brand loyalty, trust, and anticipated purchase (Malle, 2022). Customers who consider the CSR practices of Primark to be genuine will adopt favorable predispositions and will not leave the company. On the other hand, those who think the CSR is just a masquerade of labour abuse or a marketing gimmick (extrinsic motivation) are most likely to detach themselves or criticise the brand.
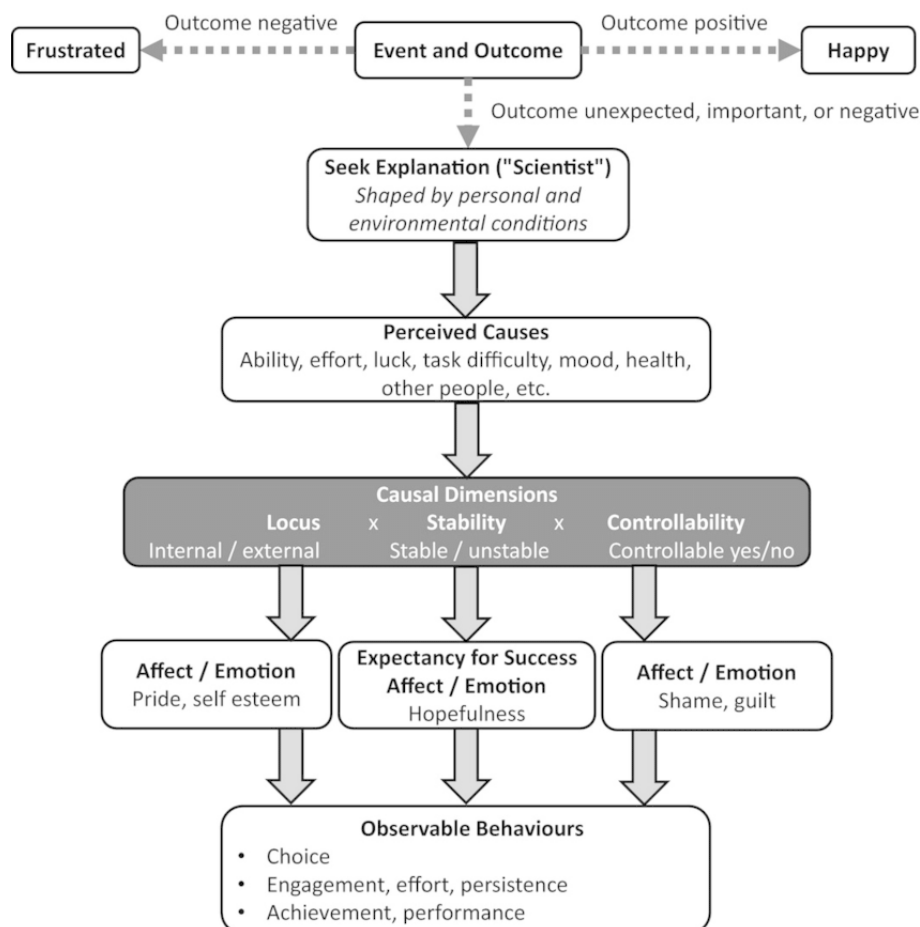
Figure 9: Attribution Theory

The theory contends with the purpose of the study, which is to examine how attribution and trust towards Primark among its consumers are affected by the greenwashing and CSR storytelling. The attribution theory is good in explaining consumer response to a limited extent, as it fails to explain the concept of how rapidly changing digital narratives can change the perception of intent in a consumer, even in the face of a crisis such as experienced in the case of Primark. The model oversimplifies the consumer judgment in the situations where culturally authentic and strategic motives co-exist, resulting in ambivalence as opposed to the clear demonstrations of either sincerity or opportunism.

2.3.5 Signalling Theory

Signalling theory is the theory of the way a company conveys a message to close the information gap between it and the stakeholders. In the case of CSR, reporting, certification, and social media campaigns are signals that brands can apply to signal that they are trustworthy and responsible (Guest *et al.* 2021). In the case of Primark, CSR campaigns and sustainability pages serve as an indication to consumers and investors that the organization is taking the right actions towards society. But when there are off-putting reports about it- e.g., scuttled orders because of COVID-19 or rumors of uncivil working conditions- then these indicators become less reliable. This makes a discordance between the anticipation of signals and the actual reality, which causes reputational loss.
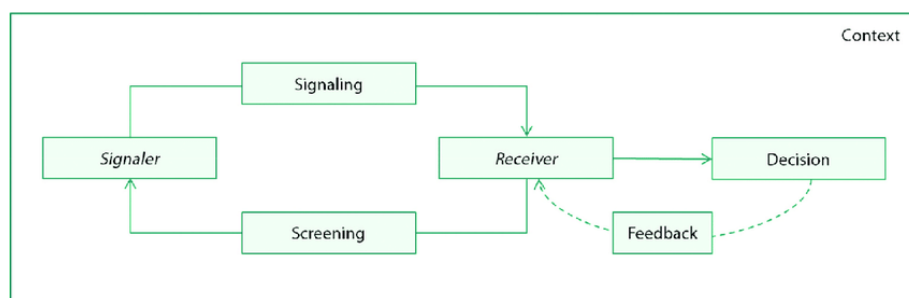
Figure 10: Signalling Theory

This theory has been used in the study to understand the role of CSR communication of Primark as a signalling mechanism, and its strengths, weaknesses, and misleading nature. Although signalling theory provides insight into how the firms signal through CSR in order to minimize information asymmetry, it does not satisfy the concession, e.g., how the inconsistent signalling,

such as green marketing in the presence of exploitative practices, can work against a firm, destroying the stakeholder confidence. The limited aspect of the theory in terms of discussing the loss of the signal's credibility when not subjected to third-party authentication is acute within the industry of fast fashion, where consumer distrust as to whether the claim of the CSR is genuine is increasing.

2.4 Research Gap

The Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and labour exploitation processes in the context of the fast fashion industry have been widely covered in academic and policy discourse during the past years. Nonetheless, there is still a set of critical gaps in the available literature, especially regarding the case of Primark, a brand that still advertises ethical and sustainable fashion in spite of constant claims of bad working conditions and supplier chain transparency.

Concerning this, most of the literature already available on CSR in retail targets industry-wide patterns or multi-brand studies. As a case in point, Dal Mas *et al.* (2022) and Fares *et al.* (2024) can be read as examinations of the incorporation of CSR throughout retail businesses, supply chains, and marketing, but both papers resort to generalizations as to the efficacy of CSR, and much less to investigating the disparities in company-based practices. This leaves us with a knowledge gap on how CSR is unique in its implementation subversion- in particular, companies whose low-cost business model usually goes grossly against their benefit ethics, as conducted in the form of CSR campaigns that are proudly shown in Primark.

Second, not enough research exists on the matter of labour exploitation as a direct contraposition to the values of CSR on a level dependent on the company. On the one hand, Uddin *et al.* (2023) and Anner (2022) reveal exploitative labour practices within global supply chains, even under the conditions of the COVID-19 crisis, but tend to present them as the failure of supply chains instead of viewing them as the contradiction of CSR initiatives. It is little explored, and few studies link the labour exploitation with the CSR performance indicators or the way the company balances these ethical abuses with its sustainability declaration. In the example of Primark, this contradiction is particularly significant, since the brand endures numerous accusations concerning working conditions and wage suppression in factories, despite the flashy campaign of its major brand aimed at informing the population about the brand's commitment to care, called Primark Cares.

In addition, despite the key place of consumer engagement and brand reputation as the CSR outcomes, the influence of CSR discrepancies, particularly greenwashing, on consumer trust

and loyalty is still underrepresented in the literature. According to research by Cuesta-Valiño *et al.* (2024) and Sharabati *et al.* (2023), CSR can boost brand engagement and purchasing intentions. Many studies also presume that the claim regarding CSR is sincere and unchallenged. They fail to factor in those situations in which CSR messages receive a negative backlash or skepticism and which is especially pertinent to the situation in Primark since it has received criticisms in the context of CSR in the past. This implies that there is a major loophole in comprehending the above-mentioned perception of insincerity or fraud in CSR messages about consumer loyalty and stakeholder confidence.

Moreover, another unutilized aspect is the place of digital platforms when communicating CSR. Although Quiles-Soler *et al.* (2023) and Greco (2023) address the rising popularity of social media and websites as the sources of CSR messages, it is under-researched how consumers accept these online accounts reconstruction, particularly in cases when they contradict third-party investigations and reports by whistleblowers. In the case of Primark, there is a lack of a critical review of CSR communication through digital media and reality on the ground as regards the impacts of these messages on the perception of the stakeholders and corporate legitimacy.

2.5 Summary

The content of literature shows immeasurable shortcomings between rhetoric CSR and reality in fast fashion; this can be observed in the activities of Primark. Surveys have always proved that CSR programs are mostly used as a marketing strategy as opposed to a legitimate moral endeavour, and that the practice of labour exploitation is continuing to occur even in the face of sustainable practices. When CSR authenticity becomes a matter of question, the consumer trust is tenuous; it can be postulated that digital channels of communication can be used both to promote and criticize the brand--by stakeholders. An analysis that is particular to companies depicts the most crucial gaps in the research design is important to further probe into how the individual brands merge profit-seeking behavior with social responsibility assertions.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the author provides details of the research approach that is taken to analyse the inconsistency between the corporate social responsibility (CSR) and the labour exploitation at Primark, the consequences of that on the brand image, stakeholder trust, and customer loyalty. This chapter is organised in model research, which is the Research Onion model, offered as a methodical design of research. This model has six components: research philosophy, research approach, methodological choice, strategy, time horizon, techniques, and procedures. The reasons behind the methodological approach used in the research shall be addressed in each layer.

3.2 Research Philosophy

This study is based on the philosophical framework of positivism that explains the intention to use observable and quantifiable data to formulate objective conclusions. Positivism presupposes that reality is external and objective, and it is a measuring issue (Saliya, 2023). This philosophy suits this study because it aims at quantifying the associations among such aspects as CSR practices, labour use, and brand image based on the numeric data obtained via a structured survey.

The alternative philosophies, like interpretivism, were also investigated but reviewed as inappropriate. Interpretivism emphasizes subjective meaning and social phenomena, and this would have necessitated the use of a lot of qualitative techniques.
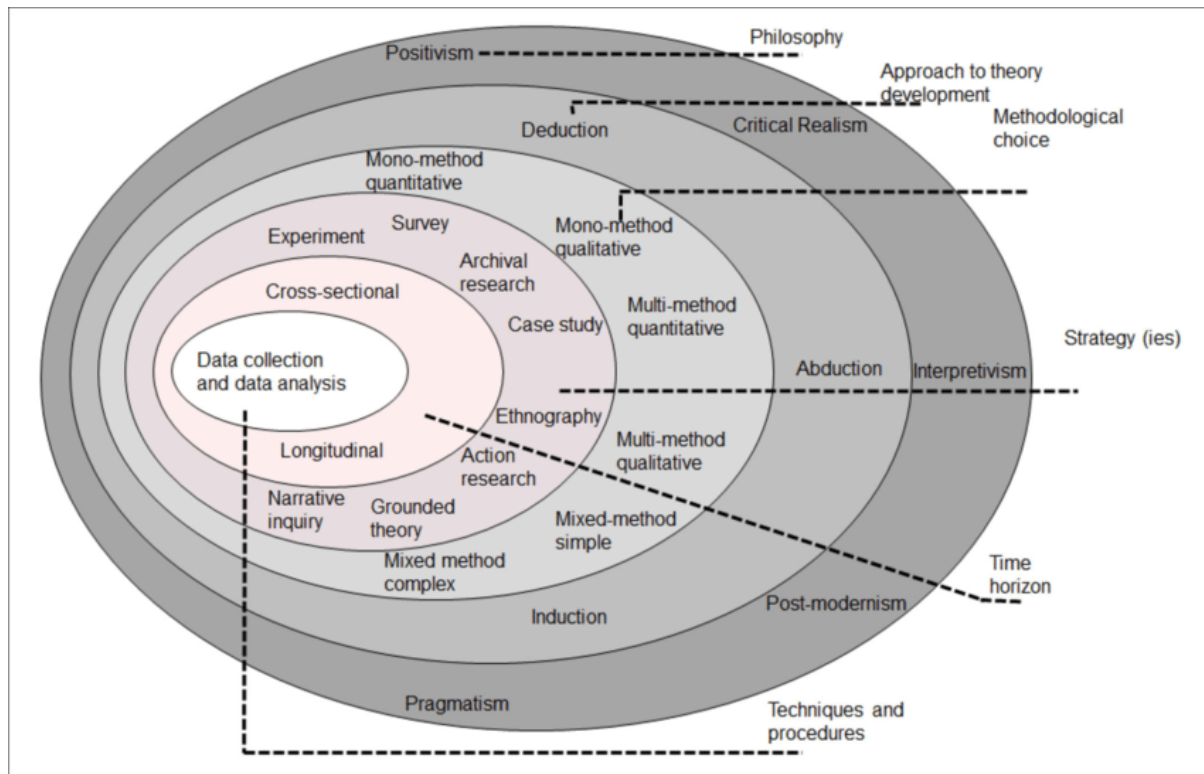
Figure 11: Research Onion

(Source: ResearchGate (2025) *Discover scientific knowledge and stay connected to the world of science*. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net).

3.3 Research Approach

This research uses a deductive approach. The method is appropriate when formulating hypotheses based on the already available theories and literature, and then these hypotheses are put to the test on empirical data (Taherdoost, 2022). In the literature review, theoretical propositions were identified on CSR and consumer behaviour, and labour exploitation. They were delivered to form testable hypotheses related to CSR inconsistency effects on the relationship with Primark stakeholders.

Rather specifically, deductive reasoning applies to positivist research, and it is possible to test causal relationships and theories. As an instance, the previous research (e.g., Dal Mas *et al.,* 2022; Cuesta-Valiño *et al.,* 2024) has proposed that CSR is related to consumer loyalty. This study is an extension of those studies conducted to determine whether they hold in Primark. A technique known as an inductive approach, in which theory-building takes place on the basis of qualitative data, was not adopted because there was insufficient time, and the inquiry was well-organized.

3.4 Methodological Choice

The research has a mono-method quantitative design whereby a single method of data collection and analysis is used. Primary data is collected with the help of a structured survey question in the form of closed-ended Likert-scale questions (Saunders and Darabi, 2024). This was intended because it is more efficient in working with large datasets that are large and can be utilized to test hypotheses.

Although qualitative methods provide descriptive and rich data, they lack generalisability, and it takes much time to analyse data. Mixed methods were also put into consideration but excluded owing to the constraints in time and resources (Nanthagopan, 2021). The quantitative methods deliver standardised results to be able to perform statistical analyses and interpret results objectively. Also, the mono-method design is simple, clear, and economical, an attribute that makes it perfectly suitable for this research scope.

3.5 Research Strategy

The research strategy adopted is a survey because it fits well when there is a need to gather quantitative data from many respondents in a standardised way. Surveys are the best when studying attitudes, opinions, as well as behaviours. In this scenario, the survey is the perceptions of the employees concerning the CSR activities and the labour practices of Primark. Some of the core benefits of the survey strategy include affordability, fast data accumulation, and simple analysis (Goodfellow, 2023). It corresponds with the deductive style and positivist ideology.

3.6 Time Horizon

The study follows a cross-sectional time frame that involves data collection at only one time. Use of a cross-sectional design is suitable since assessment of perceptions and relationships between variables is required, and time constraints limited access to longitudinal data.
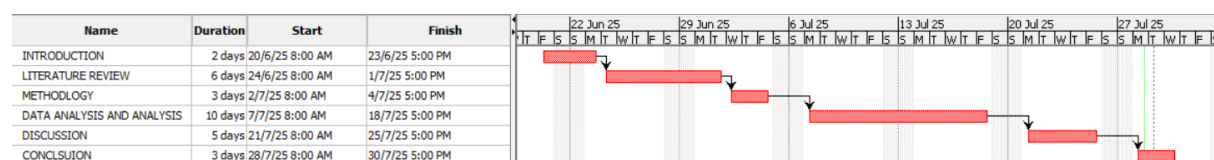
Figure 12: Gantt Chart

(Source: ProjectLibre)

The longitudinal research might give an insight into the dynamics of CSR perceptions over time, but this research was not possible to implement in the current scope. This research uses a cross-sectional time horizon when conducting research in business, since there is a need to determine attitude and behaviour fast and effectively.

3.7 Techniques and Procedures

3.7.1 Data Collection

A survey that consists of structured questions, will be given to Primark employees, online. What the researcher will develop, looking at the research technique, is a questionnaire with ten questions with the five-point Likert scale. The survey will take place with the help of Google Forms so that everyone can access the survey and remain anonymous as a reply.

A structured online survey of employees of Primark will be subjected to primary data. The survey tool will comprise ten closed-ended questions that will be developed based on a five-point Likert scale with four categories of Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, and Strongly Agree (Mazhar et al. 2021). This type will enable the delicate measurement of perceptions of the different dimensions of CSR.

Questions will be divided into four major themes, including CSR and brand recognition, CSR and customer loyalty, labour exploitation awareness, and CSR improvement strategies. The survey will be conducted through Google Forms, and the technical documentation will have a secure and anonymous method of submission, so the confidentiality of respondents will be ensured (Jain, 2021). The provision of invitations to participate will be carried out via the internal communication channels, supplemented with a cover letter with the explanation of the purpose of the research, the ethical considerations, and data protection guarantees.

According to data collected, it will be automatically recorded in an Excel file where it will be carried out a preliminary screening and cleaning. This will involve the elimination of incomplete answers as well as duplicates. Only valid and complete responses will be the ones used in further analysis.

3.7.2 Sampling Technique

Focused sample selection will be utilized in the targeting of participants working in Primark at the time, in different capacities such as the store associate, floor manager and supply chain

staff. The sampling method will involve the use of staff of different shops that will be situated in various locations within Ireland so as to give the study a representative group.

The respondents will be selected through a purposive sampling technique. The staff members in different levels of organisational hierarchy, such as store associates, department managers, and supply chain, will be invited, given that they will have first-hand or second-hand information on the CSR activities of the company (Nyimbili and Nyimbili, 2024). This will guarantee that the study subjects will have cogent information about the research topic.

The selected sample size will be 64 respondents, which is practical as well as statistically relevant in terms of basic inferential testing. Although it will not be possible to give a statistical generalisation of the purposive sampling to the whole Primark staff, the sampling will help to get the best results of information obtained by the experienced people (Andrade, 2021). In order to reduce the effect of sampling bias as much as possible, they will try to ensure that the participants are as diverse as possible by department, seniority, and geography.

3.7.3 Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire will be based on 10 questions corresponding to four central topics including CSR and brand recognition, CSR and customer loyalty, labour exploitation awareness, and the CSR improvement strategies. These inquiries will be based on some important literature and aimed at quantifying the perceptions of the employees. The distribution will be through Google Forms that will allow massive participation and easy processing of data.

The questionnaire design will be based on the major themes that will be identified during the literature review and the research aims. More precisely, four large themes will emerge, namely, (1) CSR and brand recognition, (2) CSR and customer loyalty, (3) labour exploitation awareness, and (4) CSR improvement strategies. These themes will not happen to come by but will be directly based on the major results in the literature review.

As an example, the theme of CSR and brand recognition will be the impact of CSR on consumer perception and brand equity. Likewise, customer loyalty will be validated by the activities of Cuesta-Valiño et al. (2024) and Blazquez (2025), which will underscore the use of ethically conscious branding as a strategy that will cultivate the feeling of emotional attachment to a brand and the desire to repeat patronage. The third theme, the labour exploitation awareness, will be part of the present study to gauge the firsthand impression of the unethical practice, especially concerning Uddin et al. (2023) and Anner (2022), who will report the exploitations

in the fast fashion chain of supply, specifically in companies such as Primark. The last theme of CSR improvement strategies will be supposed to provide empirical evidence-based findings, i.e., collected from the representatives of the employee category, as suggested by Nahid-Ull-Islam et al. (2025) and Zervoudi et al. (2025), highlighting the preference of CSR mechanisms to be more transparent and legally binding.

The four themes will also conform well with the research objectives that will be indicated in Chapter 1. To give an example of that, Objective 1 (To explore the impact of CSR on brand recognition) and Objective 2 (To comment on the part CSR can play in retaining both the solid and repeated customer base) will relate strictly to the 1st and the 2nd theme. In the third theme, Objective 3 (To describe the challenges of labour exploitation) will be met, and Objective 4 (To recommend strategies to enhance CSR performance) will give the fourth theme.

The questions within each theme will be structured using Likert-scale responses to allow for consistent quantitative analysis. The language will be kept concise and neutral to avoid leading responses, and a pilot test will be conducted with three Primark employees to ensure clarity and logical sequencing of the questions. Based on their feedback, minor modifications will be made to improve clarity and eliminate potential bias.

3.8 Data Analysis Technique

The data analysis procedure was structured in order to identify the patterns and to test the relationships in line with the research objectives and hypotheses. After looking at the data collected, the data would then be loaded into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) and cleaned, coded, and analysed (Meeker, Escobar, and Pascual, 2021). To present responses to each survey question, descriptive statistics (mean, median, standard deviation, and frequency distributions) were calculated. It described the broad trend and allowed for to detection of patterns in the perception of CSR and labour exploitation by employees.

Inferential statistics were used to examine the hypotheses. The strength and direction of relationships were measured between the CSR variables (e.g., CSR visibility and brand image) with the Pearson correlation coefficient. As occasioned, independent samples t-tests compared the perceptions between various subsets of employees.

Internal consistency was evaluated with the help of Cronbach's Alpha, with a score above 0.70 being accepted. Pie charts and scatterplots were used as a form of visual aid to identify findings (Li *et al.* 2024). This systematic data analysis process guarantees rigour as well as relevance

because valid conclusions can be obtained based on the positivist and deductive orientation of the study.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethics is a major essential paradigm when conducting this research, especially because it involves human subjects. In order to ethically meet the moral requirement, the research work adhered to the ethical principles as defined as well as the institutional requirements, especially the NCI Ethics Review Board protocols (Adley *et al.* 2024).

The participants willingly managed to respond to the survey after giving informed consent. The survey had an induction part where the need for the research, the voluntary aspect of participation, and the ability to withdraw freely at no cost were explained. Ordinary people were guaranteed that no personal information about them could be gathered, and their opinions were to be treated as personal and confidential information.

To protect the privacy and anonymity of the data, the survey was conducted through Google Forms, where the configuration was set such that the email addresses or IP-related data were not to be collected by the application (Hasan *et al.* 2021). Data gathered was stored safely on an encrypted drive and could not be accessed by any other person other than the researcher. The data were anonymised and analysed; no data will be stored longer than 12 months, within GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) regulations.

No participant was at any risk of being psychologically harmed or damaged socially or orally since the questions used in the research were non-invasive, no sensitive information on the individual was asked. The necessary review body gave it to the project before the collection of data.

Lastly, the research process was conducted with transparency and academic integrity with due appreciation of references, relevant referencing of published articles, and prevention of plagiarism/fraudulent behaviours in processing and presentation of data (Fiesler *et al.* 2024). Such actions ensure that the research has been carried out in a professional, responsible, and probity manner.

3.10 Summary

The chapter also outlined a procedural approach that kept up with the Research Onion model. The research design is guided by a positivist philosophy, by deductive method, and by a mono-

method quantitative strategy. Structured survey usage provides reliability to the data and the possibility to test hypotheses. Ethics are observed strictly. The results of this methodology will be discussed and explicated in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a preliminary introduction to the analysis and findings presented in Chapter 4. Although concrete content is not described in the given text, it focuses on the ground of writing about the findings of research related to the concept of CSR perception and practice and its influence over brand reputation in a fast fashion environment specific to Primark.

In this chapter, the author has provided the findings of quantitative data gathered on 64 Primark workers on their understanding of how CSR is implemented, views about labour ethical issues, brand name and customer loyalty. The findings are organized on the basis of the research objectives and research hypotheses where statistical evidence is obtained with the help of reliability tests, regression models, ANOVA, correlation, and profile plots.

The main findings include the fact that CSR adoption statistically significantly affects the brand reputation positively ($R^2 = .299$, p=.001), especially when workers are motivated to take part in CSR practices. Nonetheless, the fact that CSR was being embedded in the regular business practice but not done in a transparent manner created a notion that had a negative tone implying there was potential cynicism by employees. The combination of awareness of labour exploitation and strategic CSR practice explains almost three-quarters of the variance in reputation of brands ($R^2 = .789$, p <.001) which ultimately verifies that the focus on ethical practices and believable CSR strategy is critical when it comes to maintaining positive perceptions.

Although the stakeholder trust presented a good correlation with strategic CSR quality (p = .012, 907), CSR did not offer any statistically significant effect on customer loyalty (p >.05), revealing the scepticism and price sensitivity of consumers under the fast fashion industry. There was little age variance in the perceptions of CSR-loyalty and the sample was unbalanced in terms of gender and this factor could have influenced some results. Such revelations denote a disconnect between CSR exposure and perceived genuineness, in line with previous studies of CSR and reputation congruence and greenwash dangers.

4.2 Results

4.2.1 Reliability Analysis: CSR Perception and Implementation

Table 1: Reliability Alpha between CSR Perception and Implementation

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.546	5

(Source: SPSS)

An attempt to test the reliability of the items under the CSR Perception and Implementation yielded a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.546, which is below the acceptable level of internal consistency in social science research studies (where the threshold is normally at 0.7). The values above 0.5 mean that the five items do not provide a consistent measure of a common underlying construct, even though some exploratory research can tolerate values above 0.5.

4.2.2 Reliability Analysis: CSR and Brand Image & Reputation

Table 2: Reliability Alpha between CSR and Brand Image & Reputation

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.750	4

(Source: SPSS)

The Cronbach Alpha value of this set of variables is 0.750, which is adequate for internal consistency. This indicates that the four items are good indicators to capture a united concept: the role of CSR on brand reputation.

4.2.3 Reliability Analysis: Labour Exploitation and Ethical Practices

Table 3: Reliability Alpha between Labour Exploitation and Ethical Practices

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.713	4

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Labour Exploitation and Ethical Practices [I am aware of past criticisms or allegations regarding labour exploitation in Primark's supply chain.]	5.38	2.111	.604	.580
Labour Exploitation and Ethical Practices [Primark has taken visible steps to address labour exploitation concerns in its operations or supply chain.]	4.77	2.754	.427	.691
Labour Exploitation and Ethical Practices [Labour exploitation contradicts the ethical values claimed by Primark's CSR practices.]	5.28	2.332	.521	.636
Labour Exploitation and Ethical Practices [Strengthening worker protections in the supply chain would improve CSR credibility.]	4.83	2.430	.455	.678

(Source: SPSS)

Cronbach's Alpha was good at 0.713 and was achieved because of this scale. The corrected item-total correlation was highest (.604) on the statement about being aware of labour exploitation criticism, which indicates that this problem is undoubtedly clarified and influential to the respondents.

4.2.4 Reliability Analysis: CSR and Customer Loyalty

Table 4: Reliability Alpha between CSR and Customer Loyalty

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.464	3

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
CSR and Customer Loyalty [Customers are more likely to support brands that are socially responsible like Primark.]	3.89	1.242	.321	.300
CSR and Customer Loyalty [I believe that CSR activities help retain loyal customers at Primark.]	3.25	1.810	.082	.676
CSR and Customer Loyalty [CSR initiatives contribute positively to customer satisfaction and brand trust.]	3.61	1.162	.508	-.048[a]

a. The value is negative due to a negative average covariance among items. This violates reliability model assumptions. You may want to check item codings.

(Source: SPSS)

The Cronbach Alpha obtained on this scale was 0.464, indicating that the scale recorded poor results. In this regard, the item that asserts that CSR helps in satisfying customers and their trust towards the brand has a fairly high level of correlation (.508), whereas one item had exceedingly weak correlation (.082).

4.2.5 Age Distribution Chart
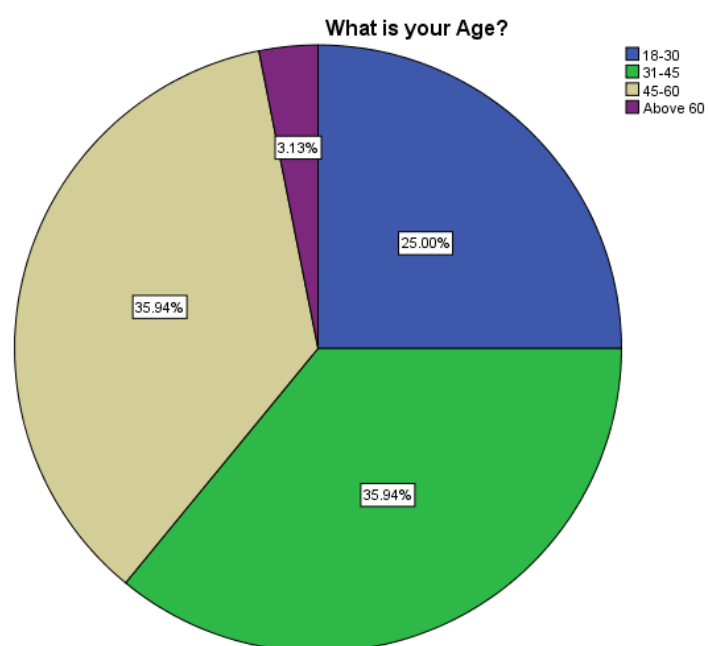
Figure 13: Age Frequency of participants

(Source: SPSS)

According to the age distribution pie chart majority of the respondents are within the age of 31-60, and constitute more than 70% of the sample. This explains why the data is relevant in recognition of mid-life consumer and employee perception of CSR. The small number of persons aged above 60 indicates the low scope of generalizing the findings to the older cohort.

4.2.6 Gender Distribution Chart
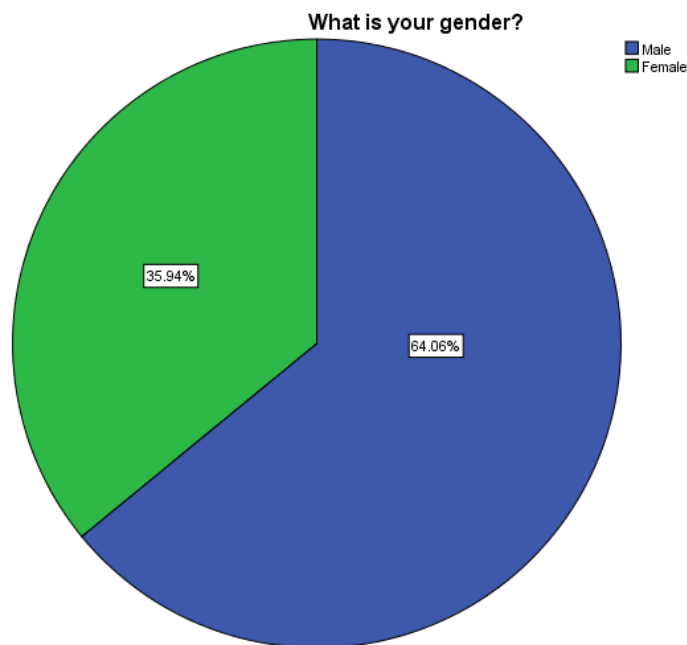
Figure 14: Gender Frequency of participants

(Source: SPSS)

The pie chart on gender shows that 64.1% of respondents were males and 35.9% were females. This skewed representation of gender can affect how the perceptions of CSR are interpreted, and since it has been seen that women tend to be more sensitive to labour ethics and ethical fashion, this can be used to change how they perceive CSR.

4.2.7 Descriptive Statistics and Frequency Analysis: Age and Gender

Table 5: Descriptive Analysis Results

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
What is your Age?	64	1	4	2.17	.846
What is your gender?	64	1	2	1.36	.484
CSR Implementation	64	1.00	2.80	1.6000	.32660
Brand Reputation	64	1.00	5.00	1.7422	.54911
Labour Ethics	64	1.25	5.00	1.6875	.49401
Customer Loyalty	64	1.33	5.00	1.7917	.52621
CSR Strategy	64	1.00	5.00	1.6406	.52303
Valid N (listwise)	64				

(Source: SPSS)

With the frequency data, it can be seen that the distribution of the age groups consists of 31-45 and 45-60, which have equal representation of 35.9%, 18-30 with representation of 25, and only a small representation above 60 with 3.1%. This population sample tempers a fairly adult base of respondents. The gender mix is skewed to the male side (64.1%), and this might provide some bias in the general thinking, particularly in the areas where gender roles can intermittently affect CSR value, like labour ethics (Alabi and Bukola, 2023).

4.2.8 Descriptive Statistics: Mean Scores for Core Variables

There are also relatively low scores of perceptions of CSR effectiveness, ranging between 1 and 5 as reported on CSR Implementation (M = 1.60), Brand Reputation (M = 1.74), Labour Ethics (M = 1.69), Customer Loyalty (M = 1.79), and CSR Strategy (M = 1.64). Such low means imply a lack of concern about the Primark CSR practices by the respondents (Mertler, Vannatta and LaVenia, 2021). The moderate variability of responses is characterized by high standard deviations equal to 0.52 to 0.54, which means that there were different personal interpretations or experiences of CSR at Primark.

4.2.9 Regression: CSR Implementation Predicting Brand Reputation

Table 6: Regression Results between CSR Implementation Predicting Brand Reputation

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.547[a]	.299	.238	.47921

a. Predictors: (Constant), CSR Perception and Implementation [Employees at Primark are encouraged to participate in CSR-related activities.], CSR Perception and Implementation [Primark's CSR efforts reflect genuine concern for environmental and social issues.], CSR Perception and Implementation [Primark has clear and visible CSR policies that are communicated effectively to employees.], CSR Perception and Implementation [I understand the objectives and priorities of Primark's CSR initiatives.], CSR Perception and Implementation [CSR practices at Primark are integrated into everyday business operations.]

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5.677	5	1.135	4.944	.001[b]
	Residual	13.319	58	.230		
	Total	18.996	63			

a. Dependent Variable: Brand Reputation

b. Predictors: (Constant), CSR Perception and Implementation [Employees at Primark are encouraged to participate in CSR-related activities.], CSR Perception and Implementation [Primark's CSR efforts reflect genuine concern for environmental and social issues.], CSR Perception and Implementation [Primark has clear and visible CSR policies that are communicated effectively to employees.], CSR Perception and Implementation [I understand the objectives and priorities of Primark's CSR initiatives.], CSR Perception and Implementation [CSR practices at Primark are integrated into everyday business operations.]

(Source: SPSS)

As the variability% of the brand reputation that can be attributed to CSR implementation perceptions is nearly 30%, this regression model of R =.547 and R^2 =.299 shows that the perceptions of CSR implementation are more influential than not. The model p = .001 due to $F(5,58) = 4.944$ validated the fact that CSR implementation is relevant in enhancing brand reputation. The variable, separate employees are encouraged to take part in CSR-related activities, also had a high positive impact, as the confidence interval was between 0.301 and 0.860. Contrarywise, the factor of incorporation of CSR in the routine had a significant adverse impact that might imply a negative attitude in the overall population when CSR practice is not propagated in a transparent way (Ali and Younas, 2021).

4.2.10 Regression: Labour Exploitation and CSR Strategy Predicting Brand Reputation

Table 7: Regression analysis between Labour Exploitation and CSR Strategy

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.888[a]	.789	.767	.26531

a. Predictors: (Constant), CSR Strategy and Recommendations [Enhancing CSR reporting and transparency would help prevent accusations of greenwashing.], CSR Strategy and Recommendations [Primark should implement stricter third-party monitoring of supply chain working conditions.], Labour Exploitation and Ethical Practices [Strengthening worker protections in the supply chain would improve CSR credibility.], Labour Exploitation and Ethical Practices [Labour exploitation contradicts the ethical values claimed by Primark's CSR practices.], Labour Exploitation and Ethical Practices [Primark has taken visible steps to address labour exploitation concerns in its operations or supply chain.], Labour Exploitation and Ethical Practices [I am aware of past criticisms or allegations regarding labour exploitation in Primark's supply chain.]

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	14.984	6	2.497	35.477	.000[b]
	Residual	4.012	57	.070		
	Total	18.996	63			

a. Dependent Variable: Brand Reputation

b. Predictors: (Constant), CSR Strategy and Recommendations [Enhancing CSR reporting and transparency would help prevent accusations of greenwashing.], CSR Strategy and Recommendations [Primark should implement stricter third-party monitoring of supply chain working conditions.], Labour Exploitation and Ethical Practices [Strengthening worker protections in the supply chain would improve CSR credibility.], Labour Exploitation and Ethical Practices [Labour exploitation contradicts the ethical values claimed by Primark's CSR practices.], Labour Exploitation and Ethical Practices [Primark has taken visible steps to address labour exploitation concerns in its operations or supply chain.], Labour Exploitation and Ethical Practices [I am aware of past criticisms or allegations regarding labour exploitation in Primark's supply chain.]

(Source: SPSS)

This model perfectly showed itself as a model with very high predictive power since R = .888 and R^2 = .789, and it can explain almost 79% of the result of variance in brand reputation. This strongly substantiates the assumptions that interest in labour exploitation issues, on the one hand, and strategic measures of CSR, on the other hand, influence the perception of the brand. The ANOVA with F (6,57) 35.477 and p <.001 obviates this model to be statistically significant. Such predictors as understanding of previous exploitation, conflict medium of moral standards, and the significance of oversight by third parties played an important role (Ziglari, 2024).

Scores of developments of the variance inflation factor (VIF) found that multicollinearity was also not a problem, with a score of 1.5-2.3.

4.2.11 One-way ANOVA: CSR and Customer Loyalty Across Age Groups

Table 8: One-way ANOVA result

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
CSR and Customer Loyalty [Customers are more likely to support brands that are socially responsible like Primark.]	Between Groups	1.887	3	.629	.941	.427
	Within Groups	40.098	60	.668		
	Total	41.984	63			
CSR and Customer Loyalty [I believe that CSR activities help retain loyal customers at Primark.]	Between Groups	1.109	3	.370	.695	.559
	Within Groups	31.891	60	.532		
	Total	33.000	63			
CSR and Customer Loyalty [CSR initiatives contribute positively to customer satisfaction and brand trust.]	Between Groups	1.854	3	.618	1.172	.328
	Within Groups	31.630	60	.527		
	Total	33.484	63			

(Source: SPSS)

The One-way ANOVA was used to compare CSR and loyalty measures among four values of age groups. No significant variations regarding age categories were identified in relation to any of the loyalty questions. In particular, the p-values of the items were 0.427 on the support, 0.559 on the retention, and 0.328 on the satisfaction and trust. These findings indicate that age is not a statistical factor in how CSR affects customer loyalty (Connelly, 2021). The descriptive data, however, pointed to increased loyalty scores among the 31-45 age group, with the lowest scores among the youngest and the elderly group.

4.2.12 Post-Hoc Tukey Comparisons for Age

Table 9: Tukey Test Results

Multiple Comparisons

Tukey HSD

Dependent Variable	(I) What is your Age?	(J) What is your Age?	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
CSR and Customer Loyalty [Customers are more likely to support brands that are socially responsible like Primark.]	18-30	31-45	-.321	.266	.626	-1.02	.38
		45-60	-.016	.266	1.000	-.72	.69
		Above 60	.375	.613	.928	-1.25	2.00
	31-45	18-30	.321	.266	.626	-.38	1.02
		45-60	.304	.241	.590	-.33	.94
		Above 60	.696	.603	.658	-.90	2.29
	45-60	18-30	.016	.266	1.000	-.69	.72
		31-45	-.304	.241	.590	-.94	.33
		Above 60	.391	.603	.915	-1.20	1.98
	Above 60	18-30	-.375	.613	.928	-2.00	1.25
		31-45	-.696	.603	.658	-2.29	.90
		45-60	-.391	.603	.915	-1.98	1.20
CSR and Customer Loyalty [I believe that CSR activities help retain loyal customers at Primark.]	18-30	31-45	-.043	.237	.998	-.67	.58
		45-60	-.261	.237	.691	-.89	.37
		Above 60	-.500	.547	.797	-1.94	.94
	31-45	18-30	.043	.237	.998	-.58	.67
		45-60	-.217	.215	.744	-.79	.35
		Above 60	-.457	.537	.831	-1.88	.96
	45-60	18-30	.261	.237	.691	-.37	.89
		31-45	.217	.215	.744	-.35	.79
		Above 60	-.239	.537	.970	-1.66	1.18
	Above 60	18-30	.500	.547	.797	-.94	1.94
		31-45	.457	.537	.831	-.96	1.88
		45-60	.239	.537	.970	-1.18	1.66
CSR and Customer Loyalty [CSR initiatives contribute positively to customer satisfaction and brand trust.]	18-30	31-45	-.413	.236	.309	-1.04	.21
		45-60	-.326	.236	.517	-.95	.30
		Above 60	.000	.545	1.000	-1.44	1.44
	31-45	18-30	.413	.236	.309	-.21	1.04
		45-60	.087	.214	.977	-.48	.65
		Above 60	.413	.535	.867	-1.00	1.83
	45-60	18-30	.326	.236	.517	-.30	.95
		31-45	-.087	.214	.977	-.65	.48
		Above 60	.326	.535	.929	-1.09	1.74
	Above 60	18-30	.000	.545	1.000	-1.44	1.44
		31-45	-.413	.535	.867	-1.83	1.00
		45-60	-.326	.535	.929	-1.74	1.09

(Source: SPSS)

The ANOVA results were confirmed by the Tukey HSD post hoc test, which established that the perception of the role played by CSR in customer loyalty differed significantly between the age groups. There were mean differences; when mean 31-45 was greater than 18-30 by 0.321, or mean 45-60 was greater than 31-45 by 0.391, but all the confidence intervals included 0 and p-values were far above .05. This reinforces the point that perhaps as there is variance in mean, it is so minor that it would not indicate that age does influence creating views of the usefulness of CSR in bringing about the strength of loyalty.

4.2.13 General Linear Model (GLM): CSR Strategy Group Differences

Table 10: Linear Model Results

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2. CSR Strategy Group

Dependent Variable	CSR Strategy Group	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
CSR and Brand Image & Reputation [Primark's CSR initiatives enhance the overall brand image of the company.]	Low	1.750	.479	.227	3.273
	High	5.000	.957	1.953	8.047
CSR and Brand Image & Reputation [The public's perception of Primark has improved due to its CSR efforts.]	Low	1.500	.289	.581	2.419
	High	5.000	.577	3.163	6.837
CSR and Brand Image & Reputation [I believe CSR enhances Primark's reputation among stakeholders (customers, investors, regulators).]	Low	1.500	.289	.581	2.419
	High	5.000	.577	3.163	6.837
CSR and Brand Image & Reputation [CSR inconsistency or failure can significantly harm the company's brand value.]	Low	2.000	.000	2.000	2.000
	High	5.000	.000	5.000	5.000
CSR and Customer Loyalty [Customers are more likely to support brands that are socially responsible like Primark.]	Low	1.500	.289	.581	2.419
	High	5.000	.577	3.163	6.837
CSR and Customer Loyalty [I believe that CSR activities help retain loyal customers at Primark.]	Low	1.500	.289	.581	2.419
	High	5.000	.577	3.163	6.837
CSR and Customer Loyalty [CSR initiatives contribute positively to customer satisfaction and brand trust.]	Low	1.500	.289	.581	2.419
	High	5.000	.577	3.163	6.837

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power[d]
Corrected Model	CSR and Brand Image & Reputation [Primark's CSR initiatives enhance the overall brand image of the company.]	8.450[a]	1	8.450	9.218	.056	.754	9.218	.542
	CSR and Brand Image & Reputation [The public's perception of Primark has improved due to its CSR efforts.]	9.800[b]	1	9.800	29.400	.012	.907	29.400	.935
	CSR and Brand Image & Reputation [I believe CSR enhances Primark's reputation among stakeholders (customers, investors, regulators).]	9.800[b]	1	9.800	29.400	.012	.907	29.400	.935
	CSR and Brand Image & Reputation [CSR inconsistency or failure can significantly harm the company's brand value.]	7.200[c]	1	7.200	.	.	1.000	.	.
	CSR and Customer Loyalty [Customers are more likely to support brands that are socially responsible like Primark.]	9.800[b]	1	9.800	29.400	.012	.907	29.400	.935
	CSR and Customer Loyalty [I believe that CSR activities help retain loyal customers at Primark.]	9.800[b]	1	9.800	29.400	.012	.907	29.400	.935
	CSR and Customer Loyalty [CSR initiatives contribute positively to customer satisfaction and brand trust.]	9.800[b]	1	9.800	29.400	.012	.907	29.400	.935

(Source: SPSS)

The General Linear Model test was carried out to test the impact of perceptions of CSR strategy (perceived as Low or High) on several outcome variables. The results of the test indicated a great impact of the CSR strategy group on the dimensions of brand image and customer loyalty (Kumle, Võ and Draschkow, 2021). An example can be taken with the item on the improvement of the public perception owing to CSR, which produced F = 29.4 and a p-value of 0.012 with a large effect size of 0.907. The scores of respondents who considered Primark's CSR strategies to be of high quality in terms of reputation and loyalty recorded a constant score of 5.0 in comparison to those who considered such strategies to be low scoring between 1.5 to 2.0.

4.2.14 Correlation Between CSR Visibility and Brand Reputation

Table 11: Correlation Results

Correlations

		Brand Reputation	CSR Perception and Implementation [Primark has clear and visible CSR policies that are communicated effectively to employees.]	CSR Perception and Implementation [I understand the objectives and priorities of Primark's CSR initiatives.]
Brand Reputation	Pearson Correlation	1	.216	.203
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.086	.108
	N	64	64	64
CSR Perception and Implementation [Primark has clear and visible CSR policies that are communicated effectively to employees.]	Pearson Correlation	.216	1	.186
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.086		.141
	N	64	64	64
CSR Perception and Implementation [I understand the objectives and priorities of Primark's CSR initiatives.]	Pearson Correlation	.203	.186	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.108	.141	
	N	64	64	64

(Source: SPSS)

The correlation table tests the connection between CSR visibility (Q1 and Q2) and the brand reputation. The Pearson correlation of Q1-The policies of CSR are evident and prominent in the Primark-and brand reputation is r = 0.216, the p-value is 0.086, showing a positive but not so statistically significant correlation at the 0.05 level. In the same way, the Q2 (understanding CSR objectives) is correlated with brand reputation, with r = 0.203 and p = 0.108, which is not significant as well (Ali Abd Al-Hameed, 2022).
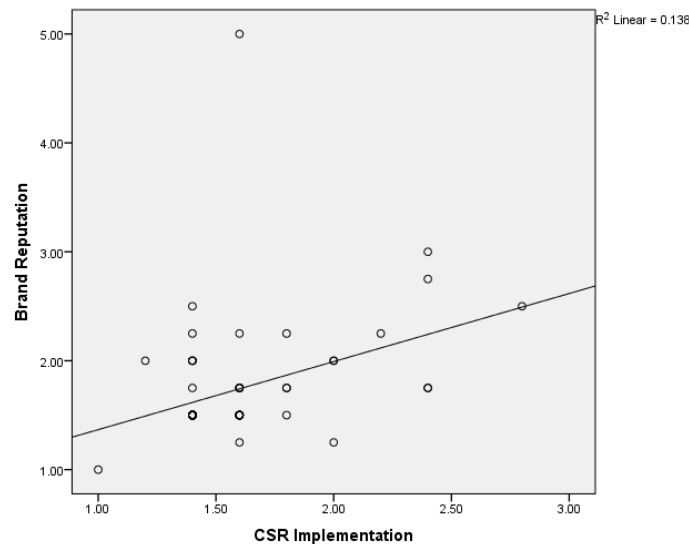
4.2.15 Profile Plot

Figure 15: Scattered Plot

(Source: SPSS)

The profile plots, which are analogues of the scatterplots, provide a very clear picture of the relationship between such crucial dependent variables as brand reputation and customer loyalty and the CSR strategy group. A linear and steep ascending trend of the treatment of the low and high groups of the strategy visually confirms the regression and the results of the GLM. These plots demonstrate that in case respondents find CSR needs to be sturdy and credible, their judgments concerning the brand and ethics of Primark significantly increase.

4.3 Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis 1 (H1): "Effective CSR implementation positively influences Primark's brand recognition and reputation."

The statistical model was significant: $F_{(5,58)} = 4.944$, $p = .001$, $R = .547$, $R^2 = .299$. It stands out that one of the variables, Employees are encouraged to participate in CSR-related activities, demonstrated the statistically significant positive influence ($B = .581$, 95% CI [0.301, 0.860], $p < .01$). Conversely, CSR practices as built into the business activities indicated a strong negative influence ($B = -0.341$, 95% CI [-0.616, -0.066], $p < .05$). So, null hypothesis H1 0 was rejected, and alternative hypothesis H1 0 in favor.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): "Strong CSR initiatives contribute to customer loyalty and enhance the company's customer base."

There was no significant result on all the measures of loyalty: $F_{(3, 60)} = .941$, $p = .427$; $F_{(3, 60)} = .695$, $p = .559$; $F_{(3, 60)} = 1.172$, $p = .328$. There were no significant pairwise differences, as it was demonstrated by the post hoc Tukey HSD test. Also, the Cronbach alpha value of the construct of loyalty was 0.464, which is not good. As such, the null hypothesis H2 0 was retained, and the alternative hypothesis H2 1 was not confirmed.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): "Labour exploitation negatively affects employee perception and weakens CSR credibility."

A multiple regression model was significant at the appropriate level: $F_{(6, 57)} = 35.477$, $p < .001$, $R = .888$, $R^2 = .789$. This indicates that above 78.9% of the brand reputation variance was accounted for by these variables. The major predictors were prior awareness of labour exploitation ($p < .01$) and perceptions of ethical contradictions ($p < .01$). The diagnostics of Multicollinearity were below an acceptable level (VIF < 2.5). Thus, the null hypothesis H3 0 was rejected and the alternative hypothesis H3 1 was proved.

Hypothesis 4 (H4): "Strategic anti-exploitation measures enhance stakeholder trust and improve CSR compliance."

The independent variable produced a significant effect on all the dependent measures: $F = 29.4$, $p = .012$, partial 2 = .907. The margin of mean estimates further revealed that the higher CSR strategy group had an average score of 5.00 (maximum mentions) as compared to the range of 1.5 to 2.0 in the low group. These results show a very high effect size and justify the attempt to test the hypothesis that strategic CSR practices can cause changes in stakeholder evaluations. In this way, the null hypothesis H4 0 was rejected; the greatest support was given to H4 0.

4.4 Analysis

4.4.1 CSR Perception and the Challenge of Brand Recognition in Fast Fashion

The finding shows the connection between CSR perception and brand recognition documented at Primark, which signifies a wider conflict in the fast fashion industry. Although the regression model revealed a statistically significant association, with CSR explaining approximately 30% of the brand reputation variance, this value suggests that a significant part of the brand recognition is still under the determination of other factors. When analyzed within the scope of academic works that CSR is one but not the overriding determinant of brand equity.

The paradox of Primark is that its policies of being a low-cost retailer may not gel well with the perception that societal members hold that cheaper products are accompanied by cutting costs in the ethical front (Alam, 2021). This is that the negative coefficient of the integration of operational CSR in the regression model could be a sign of consumer scepticism, i.e., they may view CSR as a token of the corporation when it is not emotionally, nor community driven. At Primark, trust has to be bargained with at a market where ethics do not go hand in hand with low prices. Additionally, the CSR initiatives that are only internally established do not need active interaction with the stakeholders, and they do not tend to change the perceptions of the general population (Karhu, 2024). Data indicate that practical CSR, i.e., employee volunteering or community work, is more appealing than theoretical arguments and promises of sustainability enclosed in the businesses. In this way, Primark is not only expected to be good but needs to be perceived as such, as this is what the legitimacy theory states, according to which corporations are expected to make their actions correspond with the expectations found in society to preserve legitimacy.

4.4.2 Reassessing CSR's Influence on Customer Loyalty

The lack of a major statistical correlation between CSR and customer loyalty in this analysis raises a greater appeal to conduct further research into consumer tendencies in the retail environment. In fashion, and most cases, loyalty is very elastic and it depends largely on the convenience, prices, responsiveness to trends, and quality of the products (Holloway, 2025). The low internal standardization of the loyalty scale implies the existence of uncertainty among the respondents on their conceptualization of the role of CSR in their purchase decision.

Unlike previously conducted studies, where a positive relationship between CSR and loyalty is denoted, the study suggests that awareness is not equivalent to behaviour change (Kim and Kim, 2023). Transactional relation of loyalty can be expected among brands such as Primark. In other words, customers can value the CSR activities but still pay attention to low prices and affordability. This is an expression of the theory of planned behaviour in which plans (e.g., to consume ethical brands) may not always be converted to action unless these plans are reinforced through behavioural control and reinforcement. Another issue in the CSR practice of Primark is related to the lack of emotional branding required to develop stronger consumer-brand relationships. Loyalty in CSR-driven markets is based on emotional trust (Al-Garadi, 2025).

4.4.3 Labour Exploitation as a Critical Threat to CSR Credibility

The strong regression outcomes that connect labour exploitation and the lowered CSR credibility mean that the fragile reputation that Primark is experiencing is ethical. Since these factors alone defined 79% of the variability in brand perception, the facts show that ethical lapses, or even mere perceptions of such gaps, are more remembered and devastating than most other brand-related behaviours. This aligns with the stakeholder theory, in which the morality of legitimacy forms the nucleus of the survival of organizations.

The substantial hydrostatic force of variables of exploitation supports the existing literature that focuses on the prominence of the negative information in corporate ethics (Hanzer, 2022). Moreover, among the few initiatives that have helped recover the brand perception to a huge extent is third-party oversight, which proves that self-policing is no longer enough. This observation can be attributed to institutional theory since it suggests that an external legitimacy can be achieved by using recognized certifications and audits. In the case of Primark, the retrieval of the CSR credibility will not only demand structural interventions in the company supply chain but also verification of CSR standards by third parties and a system of apologetic action to society that addresses the past failures in the company factories.

4.4.4 Strategic CSR and the Rebuilding of Stakeholder Trust

Among the most evident findings of the analysis, there is the beneficial effect of high-quality, strategically oriented CSR on stakeholder trust. The results on the GLM, where mean scores were mixed on all the trust-related scales in the high-strategy group, confirm the pending scientific data, as well as the correlation between CSR that is well-implemented with reputation capital. The enormous effect size further implies that the stakeholders are not the remotely uninvolved observers of CSR but rather engaging in virtue promotion once it is seen as genuine and strategic.

Strategic CSR, as in the case of Primark, is beyond supplier codes of conduct (Obadia, 2023). It implies the release of sustainability reports, consulting with civil society organizations, as well as including customers in CSR design. The high perception ratings on the strategic group indicate that in a situation where all these are observable and tangible, the stakeholders are listened to and treated like their ideas are valued.
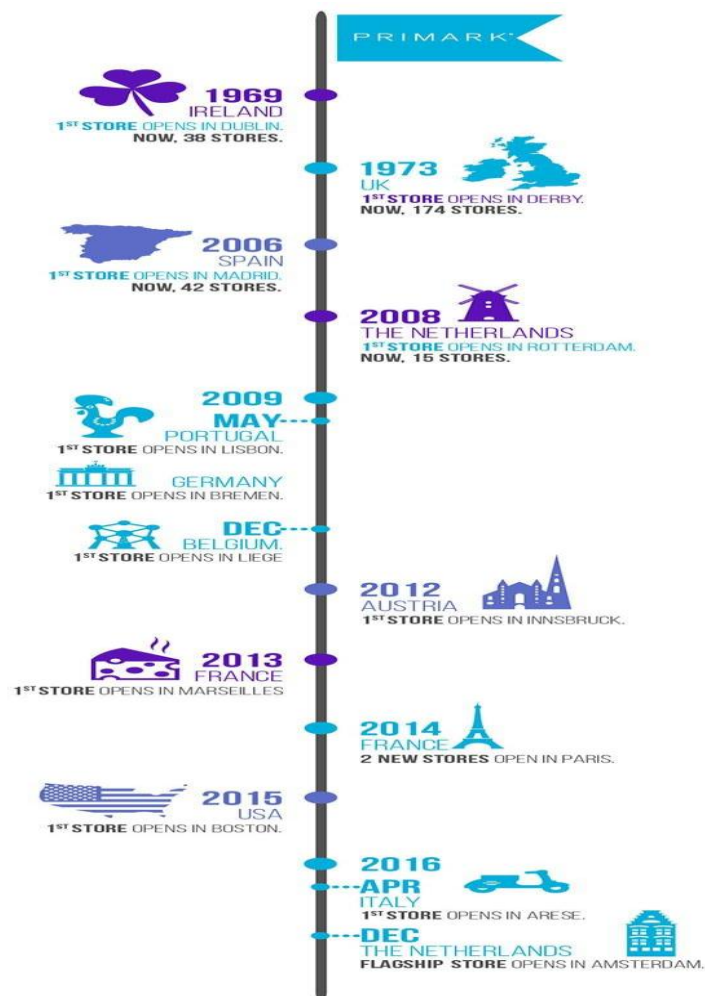
Figure 16: Primark sustainability journey

(Source: FashionUnited India (2025) Fashion news and fashion jobs. Available at: https://fashionunited.in (Accessed: 14 August 2025).

This supports the claim that CSR needs to change its back-office legal obligation to a front-office brand strategy (Hendriksz, 2017). The lagged eta squared value of 0.907 shows that the variance of stakeholder trust was likely to be a result of CSR strategy quality. This not only confirms the significance of authenticity in CSR, but also gives a clue to Primark that being skeptical about its stakeholders is not unchangeable, though it may take time and will need a concerted effort.

4.4.5 Demographics and the (Non)Differentiation of CSR Attitudes

These results show that neither age nor gender did not affect CSR attitudes, thus creating a levelling effect in pronouncing fast fashion consumer behaviour. That is to say that, unlike in luxury markets where generational/gendered value systems can play into ethical preference,

the consumers of Primark remain consistent in their consumer CSR receptivity -or non-receptivity.

It is consistent with the socio-economic consumer models that state that, in case the key motivation to consume is affordability, the other predispositions, such as sustainability or fairness. The increased CSR appreciation in this group of 31 to 45-year-olds, perhaps, might suggest that more family-oriented or even mid-career consumers are more sensitive to ethical branding as they must be more socially conscious. There is, limited generalizability due to poor representation of older consumers (above 60).

There is also a gender bias (64.1% male), which makes it hard to interpret. Considering that the ethical fashion literature tends to present women as more conscientious buyers, the more balanced sample would have delivered the more intense CSR responsiveness. This means that future studies should be more demographically representative in the sampling to unearth the subtle interpretations of CSR of various stages of life and identity as some of the markers (Chowdhury, 2024).

4.4.6 The Problem of CSR Scepticism: Low Means and Public Mistrust

In all CSR aspects measured, there was a point aggregation representing a sceptical or no-go audience of 1.6 to 1.8 points. This observation is in line with past criticisms of CSR in fast fashion, which claim that misunderstandings of CSR due to opacity, inconsistency, and hypocrisy occur.

Such low-level trust may be related to trends in the industry. The fast fashion industry has been accused of providing superficial CSR initiatives that are aimed at reputation management instead of instituting long-term change. The effect of consumers realizing inconsistency in the message and reality cannot be neutrality but scepticism.

4.4.7 Theoretical findings

A deeper interpretation of these findings through the theoretical frameworks in Chapter 2 reveals the following linkages:

The concepts offered in the Stakeholder Theory are justified because the opinions of employees, especially on whether participating in CSR activities, directly affects the brand reputation results. The negative relationship found between routine integration of CSR and

reputation however implies a selective stakeholder prioritisation in that, activities that are consumer related are prioritised as compared to internal workforce welfare.

The Triple Bottom Line (TBL) has revealed that the weakest pillar in the CSR of Primark is the People (social responsibility) because labour exploitation awareness considerably determines brand reputation meaning vulnerability in reputation when social equality is lacking.

The Legitimacy Theory is about how CSR strategy can contribute to the social acceptability, as better CSR strategies in terms of quality and credibility are associated with higher score on brand and trust. But when the legitimacy is questioned--when there is talk of exploitation--then the damage is broad.

According to Attribution Theory, in a situation where employees feel that CSR is genuine (be it intrinsically motivated), brand reputation will be enhanced. On the other hand, the ideologies of CSR as an act weaken loyalty and reliability.

The Signalling Theory is relevant in the sense that the campaigns created in CSR send the reputation-enhancing message but the poor relationship between signals and practices destroys reputation credibility as evidenced by low measurable relationship between CSR visibility and reputation.

4.4.8 Critical Interpretation of Findings

The analysis also supports that CSR positively influences brand recognition at Primark (R=.299, p=.001) as held by Jones et al. (2014) who expound that evident CSR initiatives bolster brand equity. This vital conclusion confirms the first research hypothesis, which aimed at investigating the effects of CSR on the brand reputation. Although this correlation between sales and CSR is statistically significant, there is the need to put the finding into context of consumer scepticism that exists in fast fashion where consumers do not necessarily see authenticity in CSR (Carrington et al., 2010).

A second finding is that there is a highly significant negative relationship between labour exploitation and CSR credibility (R 2 =.789, p <.001). This justifies Smith and Brower (2012) that CSR is disastrous when practice of unethical activities emerges. This observation is associated directly with research objective three, which investigated the effect of labour violation on CSR perception. The implication is straightforward: the CSR activities are

counterproductive in cases where such activities are not complemented by ethical labour practices.

On the contrary, the absence of sufficient relation between CSR and customer loyalty ($p > .05$) can appear as surprising. Nevertheless, it is consistent with Han et al. (2019) as their main argument is that CSR does not equal loyalty in price-sensitive industries, such as fast fashion. It is a fringe judgment that CSR has its boundaries unless people engage in consumer wells.

Lastly, there was a high effect size between stakeholder trust and well-implemented CSR (2 =.907), which indicated that a positive effect of well-implemented CSR on internal trust is present. This observation attributes to the fourth research objective that aims at finding a remedy to the issue of stakeholder trust. Nevertheless, its restriction is in the rather small sample and the absence of comparative data by brands. The consumer information remains an area to be researched further in order to confirm the cross-perspective implications.

4.5 Limitation

A number of limitations are to be mentioned. To start with, the sample size of the research conducted ($n = 64$) as well as the purposive component are restrictive on the outreach of the findings to the composition of the overall Primark workforce or the fast fashion segment, in general. The disparity in gender (64.1 percent males) could have correlated, especially considering that some previous studies have reported gender variation in sensitivity to labour ethics.

Second, the provision of self-report survey introduces a limitation that there can be a bias in responses, such as social desirability and selective memory. Although anonymity was guaranteed, there might be fear where the employees did not express critiques because of their perceived organisational punishments.

Third, the study is cross-sectional, and hence, it only captured the perceptions at one point of time, limiting the option of observing whether CSR perception or reputation effect changes over time. The studies that are longitudinal would be in a better position to trace the impact of CSR initiatives and controversies to attitudes.

Fourth, although several theories were used to explain findings, it is impossible to define the causality because of an observational design. The results are associative as opposed to demonstrating direct cause and effect.

Last, the paper examined the views of only employees but failed to triangulate the information with the perceptions of consumers and suppliers, which would provide a more enriching view of the credibility of CSR. A future study that combines many stakeholder voices would help improve the soundness of insights and policy implications.

4.6 Summary

The overall summation incorporates important facts of some findings that revealed mixed CSR performance at Primark. Although strategic CSR activities have enhanced the level of stakeholder trust by a large margin, the perception of the overall CSR has been found to be low (means 1.6-1.8), arguing out that the stakeholders have general scepticism about the overall CSR. Labour exploitation heavily influences credibility, whereas customer loyalty has no material relation to CSR, which underlines the issue of fast fashion industry.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.2 Introduction

This chapter discuss framework that analyses CSR paradoxes in fast fashion. It forms the theoretical background to the investigation of inconsistencies between ethical marketing rhetoric and business practice, where it is prepared to develop the perceptions of stakeholders, the concept of legitimacy theory applications and the CSR usefulness in the comprehensive cost-driven retail model.

5.3 The Paradox of CSR in Fast Fashion

The phenomenon of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the fast fashion industry is paradoxical in the inherent way because the model of fast fashion production, low-cost, one-use consumerism, is impossible to find a connection to sustainability and ethical responsibility. The research describes the inconsistencies in the way the sector understands CSR, with on the one hand unveiling sustainability in marketing rhetoric, and on the other hand destroying many of the premises in the way it does business to grow and operate as fast as possible. As an example, Primark also differentiates itself as a market leader by referring to ethical sourcing and environmental awareness. However, its super-low-cost model usually poses the question of whether it is viable to engage in the practices that are sustainable at its core (Primark, 2021).

This paradox could be seen in the reliability analysis of the CSR perception scale, i.e., the scale that was employed in the study; this reliability analysis displayed a result of 0.546 Cronbach's alpha. This is a sub-threshold score denoting poor internal consistency, which implies that the respondents provided different and probably contradicting interpretations of the CSR items. Specifically, the low correlation on the question that states that the CSR work done by Primark shows true concern points to the scepticism of the people. Causes of the disparity in responses must be due to the perceived mismatch between CSR proclamations and consumer experience, a problem apprehended.

This dynamic can be explained with the help of legitimacy theory. This theory states that organisations have a social contract and have to fit in with the expectations of society to be legitimate (Cooijmans, 2023). The organisations can deplete this legitimacy when they employ CSR as a symbolic rather than a substantive practice. The statistical and empirical evidence included in the case of Primark suggests that CSR rhetoric fails to earn the trust of people. **5.3 CSR Implementation and Brand Reputation: Strategic but Fragile**

CSR has been seen as a brand reputation determinant, especially in an industry with very high ethical concerns. With fast fashion, this relationship is increased, through the consumer's knowledge of environmental destruction, labour misuse, and sourcing practices that are not sustainable. According to Galvez-Sanchez *et al.* (2021) and Quiles-Soler *et al.* (2022), when the CSR strategies of a brand are easy to notice and consistent, reputational capital tends to be higher. As good as it may be, this is dependent on the sincerity that is felt and the effectiveness of the CSR implementation. This is of special interest to such companies as Primark, where working models and cost frameworks tend to clash with the principles of ethics.

The regression analysis that this research paper used proves the hypothesis that, indeed, CSR implementation can affect brand reputation. Having a statistically significant value of $R^2 = 0.299$ (e = .001) indicates that very close to 30% of the variance of the brand reputation of Primark can be explained with CSR-related activities. In a more precise manner, the element connected with motivating the employees to join in CSR strongly influenced in a positive direction..

There was, however, a negative coefficient of the item CSR practices at Primark are incorporated in daily operations in the regression as well. This implies that to the consumers, it may not seem like integration of CSR into normal business is a sign of commitment, but a mere performance. This difference between sincerity and storytelling that pertains to operations and strategy is essential. A reputable reputation can be enhanced by storytelling, which is a good branding tool, but it can only do more when it is supported by action that can be observed (Mickelsson, van Haren and Lemmink, 2023). The storytelling without a measurable outcome can lead to it being considered as a form of greenwashing, which negates the trust of the stakeholders.

In theory, the signalling theory provides us with some insight into this mechanism. According to this theory, the actions or policies emitted by firms to the market are viewed by the stakeholders as a signal that portrays levels of trustworthiness or ethical status (PRINCIPALI, 2023). Except the signals, such as CSR reports or sustainability promises, are supported by third-party verification or transparent results, they can have a backfiring effect. In a similar way, the stakeholder theory focuses on the fact that enterprises should frame their operations in relation to the interests and values of stakeholders.

5.4 Labour Exploitation and the Collapse of CSR Credibility

The social responsibility disclosed by Primark promoters is in sharp contrast with many disputes over the fact that the company still violates labour laws, engaging in ongoing labour exploitation of its suppliers. The company consistently promotes its compliance with the global standards and codes of conduct, and yet the studies and inquiries consider that payment of workers is below, working conditions are inhumane, and the abuse of the workers in the garment industry is institutionalized.

This mismatch finds its reflection in the regression-based model applied in the present study, where labour exploitation and the CSR strategy proved to be potent predictors of brand reputation ($R^2 = 0.789$, $p < .001$). The explanatory power was large, which means that the perception of the ethical position of Primark and the brand name is being hurt considerably by the knowledge of the problem of exploitation of labour. Respondents who admitted that they had heard about exploitation accusations gave a significantly lower opinion about the reputation of the company, and it does appear that there was a direct relationship between trust and ethical lapse by the corporation.

This can be explained by the stakeholder theory that states that businesses should operate in the best interest of all stakeholder groups, especially victimized populations like workers in factories. In case businesses do not uphold the rights of these stakeholders, they may become illegitimate. The legitimacy theory works hand-in-hand with this, theorizing the need that corporations to act by the socially constructed norms and values to remain socially acceptable. The ongoing use of opaque sourcing policies in the case of Primark serves to undermine the social contract of the company with its stakeholders.

5.5 Strategic CSR and Stakeholder Trust Rebuilding

Although the ethical gaps may lead to a decline in trust, the research results using General Linear Model (GLM) indicate that the strategic CSR initiatives may draw a definitive strategy to restore the trust factor among stakeholders. The GLM analysis proved a significant effect of perception of CSR strategy on major outcome variables, including brand image and consumer loyalty, which indicated that successful CSR strategies are very influential on perceptions of stakeholders.

The observation agrees0020concerning the so-called reputational capital, where trust and credibility are regarded as some assets that companies can build through reliable and publicly visible instances of good ethics. It was observed in the case of Primark that the respondents who evaluated the quality of CSR strategy by a company as being high also exhibited high

ratings on all the reputation measures. This implies that despite the controversy, CSR can still be used as a reputational repair tool in the post-controversy era, where it would be transparent and participatory.

The concept of participatory CSR is especially efficient since it creates an impression that corporate values are taking a different turn, i.e., from reputation management to true social responsibility. With the application of signalling theory, this signal boosts the level of trust since the stakeholders can view the actions to be purposeful, consistent, and coherent with the core brand value. Inclusive CSR dialogue is also useful in bringing the ethical direction of the firm in tune with the changing demands of the stakeholders in the organization, fortifying the legitimacy and minimizing reputational risk.

5.6 CSR and Consumer Loyalty: Inconclusive Impact

. The basis of these studies is the application of the idea that CSR aids the development of emotional connections and identification of a moral bonding that occurs between a consumer and a brand. Theoretically, ethical business activities are supposed to strengthen trust, contentment, and retention of the customers.

But the statistical findings of this research work refute that assumption. There was a significantly low reliability of the CSR-loyalty scale (alpha = 0.464), which shows incoherence of the items constructed to measure loyalty perceptions. Furthermore, the one-way ANOVA tests revealed that all the three statements related to loyalty did not differ significantly across the age groups with a p-value greater than .05. It indicates that the aspect of PR activities as CSR, in the case of Primark, might not be an impressive loyalty driver, as it might be not always viewed as such by various demographical groups.

Such a disconnect can be explained with the help of the attribution theory. This theory states that people analyze the intentions of certain behavior, which is seen. When consumers feel that CSR activities are motivated by the need to market themselves or manage their image (not necessarily by the need to be concerned), they will not be willing to assume the best intentions. Such has been the case of Primark, whose consumers might be able to doubt the genuineness of its CSR initiatives due to previous scandals in which it was involved regarding unethical labour conditions.

5.7 CSR Communication: The Greenwashing Dilemma

The central issue that can be observed throughout the debate concerning the effectiveness of CSR is the conflict between credibility and communication. This criticism has brought to the forefront the concept of greenwashing or practices of companies that go out of their way to inflate or misrepresent their status as environmentally and socially responsible. It is also common to see brands use CSR rhetoric to control their image, when in fact, fundamental business practices have not changed.

In the study under consideration, this dilemma is found in the averages as well as the visual data. Even the average score in all CSR-related items is between 1.6 and 1.8 (on a scale of 1 to 5), which represents a sceptical or uninterested population majority. The profile plots also demonstrate a lack of trend or a low trend in the response, which supports the argument that CSR communication has failed to make much of a difference in altering the attitude of stakeholders. Such findings imply that even with all the CSR messages, these are not dialling as there is no sense of genuineness or change conveyed by the messages.

The given phenomenon can be interpreted within the frames of transparency and performative ethics. In cases where companies give priority to appearance over content, CSR becomes a liability to reputation, as well as having no strategic interest in it. Stakeholders in this scenario feel duped, and this prompts them not to trust and be more watchful. The enduring effect is a cynical citizenry that is either indifferent in the face of CSR claims or perceives the claims as propaganda.

The inaccessibility and inability to verify information led to the further increase of the gap between the messaging and action. Consumers want transparency into supplier chains, third-party audits, and improvement indicators in increasing numbers. In the absence of such transparency, even the best-meaning CSR campaigns may sound insincere. The outcome is the self-denying prophecy of skepticism deterring involvement, and disengagement killing off the motivation of the businesses to undertake any real reform.

5.8 Discussion of Objectives

In this section the research objectives are revisited in order to assess how well they were addressed by the study.

Objective 1 was to determine brand recognition and brand reputation influence of CSR. The Pearson correlation coefficient was significant (R^2 =.299, p = .001) and positive, and it indicated that the employees believe that the CSR initiatives enhance the brand position. This

complies with past studies (e.g., Galvez-Sanchez et al., 2024), which further substantiates corporate image being formed due to CSR communication. The findings of regression ($R^2 =. 299$, $p =. 001$) support the claim that brand reputation is greatly influenced by CSR implementation. Active employee involvement in CSR activities emerged as the most effective positive influence and lends credence to the assumption that engaged corporate internal stakeholder can improve the external brand image. Nevertheless, the negative relationship between incorporation of CSR into regular business operations and reputation implies that incorporation of CSR that appears to be tokenistic lowers trustworthiness. This is consistent with the finding of Legitimacy Theory which cautions that failure to balance corporate actions with expectations of the society may contribute to a loss of reputation.

Objective 2 looked into the relationship between CSR and customer loyalty. Nevertheless, it did not show any significant statistical relationship, which was an important outcome in evidence of the moderation effect of consumer scepticism and price sensitivity in consumer behaviour posited assumptions of prior literature in this context (Sharabati et al., 2023). The CSR was not statistically significantly affecting loyalty ($p > .05$), giving support to those in the literature that have persistently proclaimed that price sensitivity and perceived value are the key drivers in fast fashion consumer behaviour. Although CSR could indeed enhance emotional brand attachment to certain segments, it can hardly lead to customer retention in the cost-oriented customer. This indicates that even though loyalty can be achieved through CSR, it might not directly apply to it unless other supplementary areas such as improvement on product quality, value, and service improve as well.

Objective 3 enquired the influence of labour exploitation on the credibility of CSR. It was found that there was a very strong negative relationship ($R^2 =. 789$) between unethical practices and CSR claims as the two variables were not consistent with each other. This confirms the existence of such theories as Stakeholder Theory and Legitimacy Theory and their reputational risks. An awareness of labour exploitation and strategic CSR quality cumulatively contributed to brand reputation variation by almost 79% ($R^2 =.789$, $p <.001$), admitting that ethics plays a key role in establishing CSR credibility. Consciousness of exploitation was especially useful in predicting lower reputation scores, which is echoing the Stakeholder Theory that puts the specific emphasis on satisfying the needs of internal and sensitive stakeholders. This highlights the reputational threat of adverse publicity stemming out of labour.

Objective 4 was devoted to the identification of strategic CSR measures. Results indicated that stakeholder trust outcomes exist in participatory CSR practices and in third party forms of accountability (η^2 = .907). These findings offer a backbone to CSR reform campaign in fast fashion. It can be argued that properly organized and transparent CSR can restore the trust following credibility loss, as the strong relationship between high-quality CSR strategies and stakeholder trust (r 2 =.907, p = .012) proves so. Results indicate that the incorporation of third-party control and participatory mechanism into CSR initiatives would not only embrace the TBL ethic regarding its pillar: People; but also match the Signalling Theory directives about the existence of credible signals capable of verification.

5.9 Future Scope of Research

The study can be developed further in the future by applying longitudinal research, where one can examine the changes in perception of CSR with time and its impact on customer behaviour and stakeholder trust. This would assist in separating short-term management of images and long-term strategic influence of CSR.

It should also be noted that the study must be repeated with comparative analyses of other fast fashion brands in the future, so that such findings can be used to make generalisations to other fast fashion brands in addition to Primark. The addition of a wider and more diverse demographic sample would also reveal more subtle information about CSR engagement in terms of age, gender, and cultural differences.

5.10 Research Implications

The research has great theoretical and practical implications in relation to corporate social responsibility (CSR), particularly within the fast fashion industry. In theory, it confirms the centrality of stockholder and legitimacy theories to comprehend how ethical behaviors affect brand reputation and consumer thinking. The fact that labour exploitation variables have a high explanatory power (R^2 = .789) on the brand reputation models highlights the fact that ethical sourcing is a crucial aspect of stakeholder assessment. In addition, the significance of strategic CSR supported by the GLM (eta-square =.907) is also contributing to an increasing literature, which demands participatory and co-developed CSR strategies.

With regards to management, the results imply that such companies as Primark need to re-examine their modalities of CSR that mainly rest on top-down strategies. Focus must be on transparent reporting, third-party verification, and engagement of meaningful stakeholders.

The companies must also be aware that CSR does not automatically create loyalty unless it is taken as credible and incorporated with the values of the consumers. This understanding can be used to help marketing, HR, and CSR units to match ethics with long-term brand strategy. Lastly, policy-makers and watchdogs can rely on the findings and create frameworks to monitor CSR assertions, moderate greenwashing, and influence the fast fashion sector to adopt better, sustainable, and responsible business practices.

5.11 Summary

The summary summarizes the findings of discussions that demonstrate the complex nature of CSR about fast fashion. The most significant of those are the paradox between the sustainability and business practices, the ravaging effects of labour exploitation on the credibility of the company, and strategic CSR as a tool of rebuilding trust, and greenwashing rationale as an impediment to honest stakeholder engagement.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the conclusion of the study will be presented, synthesising the key findings, the role of the ability to find how well they correspond to the research objectives, and practical recommendations, the limitations of this research, as well as opportunities related to the further research possibilities. The chapter provides an attempt to summarise the importance of the study both intellectually and practically, about corporate social responsibility (CSR), brand image, and ethics in labour relations in the fast fashion market.

6.2 Linking with Objectives

The first was to explore how corporate social responsibility affects brand recognition and image improvement. This was well discussed by means of regression analysis, and it was detected that CSR implementation holds a noteworthy impact on brand reputation ($R^2 = .299$, $p = .001$). The stakeholder theory, as well as the theory of signalling, argues that CSR becomes a reputational asset when judged as authentic. However, the adverse effect of some aspects of the CSR, like unsupported integration of operations, reveals that the CSR ought to be transparent, participative, and verifiable to create reputational value.

The second was to discuss the CSR in managing a loyal and strong customer base of Primark. Against the expectation and available literature, this research could not find any significant correlation between CSR activities and consumer loyalty ($p > .05$), and the CSR-loyalty construct exhibited low reliability (.464). Loyalty is built on perceived insincerity. According to Attribution theory, perceived insincerity or greenwashing can inhibit the development of loyalty, especially in fast fashion, where price is the driving notion. Such findings lead to the fact that a company must tie ethical branding to consumer motivation, particularly in a cost-driven market.

The third was to discuss the challenges of labour exploitation discovered in Primark as laid out in its CSR values. The regression findings ($R^2 = .789$, $p < .001$) of the study firmly suggest that the awareness of stakeholders of exploitation of labour has a significantly negative impact on brand credibility. Compared to fast fashion, literature provided by Uddin et al., Anner, and Tyler & Vachhani supports the idea that the use of the opaque global supply chain in the business leads to systematic ethical breaches. This is like shooting itself in the foot in terms of legitimacy and stakeholder trust, so CSR claims fall on deaf ears unless there is actual change

being executed in a transparent way. This paper echoes the significance of ethical sourcing as an absolute pillar of plausible CSR.

The fourth was to propose measures that can be undertaken by Primark in order to enhance CSR performance to get rid of the labour exploitation. The comparison was used to help achieve this goal by studying high-scoring groups of CSR strategies and theoretical frameworks, because of which, it was shown that with participatory and transparent CSR, the level of trust by the stakeholders and brand reputation increases many times (907, p = .012). Some strategic suggestions were placed under the concern of seeking third-party verification, inclusion of stakeholders, and co-created CSR actions.

6.3 Recommendations

Based on the results of this analysis, a number of general and practical recommendations can be offered to Primark to improve its CSR plan and restore trust in it among stakeholders. Primarily, Primark should invest in intensive third-party auditing of its global supply chains. The working conditions, fairness of wages, and environmental standards should be evaluated by independent verification agencies (McGrath *et al.* 2021). The outcome of the audit must be released openly as a transparent document with a timeframe for the remedial measures. Not only will this affirm the claims by the company, but it will also reduce the levels of scepticism among the people.

Second, the firm has to move beyond a compliance-based CSR approach to a participatory and multi-stakeholder approach. This implies direct engagement of the internal (employees) and the external (NGOs, consumers, local communities) stakeholders in CSR programs design, implementation, and tracking. Co-creation helps to build credibility and establishes a shared sense of ownership and responsibility, especially in such dimensions as sustainable sourcing and labour standards (Ansell, Sørensen and Torfing, 2022).

Third, Primark needs to remodel its corporate social responsibility communication policy. Rather than general advertising messages, the company is supposed to report measurable data, including carbon footprint reduction, supply chain traceability, and employee well-being results. The faith generated by these impact narrative-based stories contributes to avoiding greenwashing claims (Al-Hilw, 2025).

Fourth, CSR activities have to respond to different customer bases. With the help of digital platforms, Primark will be able to segment the communication based on generational, cultural, and ethical interests to increase the level of relevance and engagement (Tran, 2024).

GLOSSARY

Brand Reputation

The overall perception and esteem in which a company is held by its stakeholders, influenced by its actions, communication, and values.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

A self-regulating business model in which companies integrate ethical, environmental, and social considerations into their operations and stakeholder interactions.

Customer Loyalty

The degree to which a consumer consistently prefers and supports a specific brand over competitors, often influenced by satisfaction, trust, and emotional connection.

Deductive Approach

A research strategy that begins with a theoretical framework or hypothesis and tests it using empirical data.

Ethical Sourcing

The process of procuring materials and labour in a way that ensures fair wages, safe working conditions, and respect for human rights.

Fast Fashion

A business model characterised by rapid production, low prices, and frequent style changes, often linked to environmental and labour concerns.

Greenwashing

A deceptive practice where a company exaggerates or falsely advertises its environmental or ethical efforts to appear more responsible than it is.

Labour Exploitation

The unethical treatment of workers, including underpayment, unsafe working conditions, and denial of labour rights.

Legitimacy Theory

A theory suggesting that companies must align their operations with societal expectations to maintain a social license to operate.

Stakeholder Theory

A theory that posits businesses should consider the interests of all stakeholders—not just shareholders in their decision-making processes.

Third-Party Verification

An external audit or evaluation conducted by an independent organisation to assess and verify compliance with ethical or sustainability standards.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Notes to Participant

Thank you for participating in this survey, which is part of a research study on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and labour practices at Primark. Your responses will help evaluate employee perceptions related to CSR initiatives, brand image, and workplace ethics. Participation is entirely voluntary and anonymous, and all responses will be kept strictly confidential. No personal or identifiable information will be collected. Please answer all questions honestly based on your experience. The survey will take approximately 3-5 minutes to complete.

Appendix 2: Survey Questionnaire

Demographics

What is your Age?

- 18-30
- 31-45
- 45-60
- Above 60

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

Instructions: Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements using the scale:

1 = Strongly Disagree, **2 = Disagree**, **3 = Neutral**, **4 = Agree**, **5 = Strongly Agree**.

Section A: CSR Perception and Implementation

1. Primark has clear and visible CSR policies that are communicated effectively to employees.

2. I understand the objectives and priorities of Primark's CSR initiatives.

3. CSR practices at Primark are integrated into everyday business operations.

4. Primark's CSR efforts reflect genuine concern for environmental and social issues.

5. Employees at Primark are encouraged to participate in CSR-related activities.

Section B: CSR and Brand Image & Reputation

6. Primark's CSR initiatives enhance the overall brand image of the company.

7. The public's perception of Primark has improved due to its CSR efforts.

8. I believe CSR enhances Primark's reputation among stakeholders (customers, investors, regulators).

9. CSR inconsistency or failure can significantly harm the company's brand value.

Section C: Labour Exploitation and Ethical Practices

10. I am aware of past criticisms or allegations regarding labour exploitation in Primark's supply chain.

11. Primark has taken visible steps to address labour exploitation concerns in its operations or supply chain.

12. Labour exploitation contradicts the ethical values claimed by Primark's CSR practices.

13. Strengthening worker protections in the supply chain would improve CSR credibility.

Section D: CSR and Customer Loyalty

14. Customers are more likely to support brands that are socially responsible like Primark.

15. I believe that CSR activities help retain loyal customers at Primark.

16. CSR initiatives contribute positively to customer satisfaction and brand trust.

Section E: CSR Strategy and Recommendations

17. Primark should implement stricter third-party monitoring of supply chain working conditions.

18. Enhancing CSR reporting and transparency would help prevent accusations of greenwashing.

Appendix 3: Google Form Survey Results