

The Effect of Corporate Social Responsibility Activities of Container Shipping Companies on Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty

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Abstract

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is increasingly gaining importance for businesses due to its multifaceted and mutually beneficial advantages it offers to society, the environment, and other stakeholders. In addition to the benefits it provides to stakeholders, businesses contribute to competitive advantage, corporate reputation, customer satisfaction, and loyalty through the activities implemented within the framework of CSR, consequently enhancing company productivity and profitability. In other words, CSR is not only perceived as an ethical responsibility but also as a strategic advantage for businesses. Numerous academic studies have evidenced the provision of such benefits by businesses' CSR activities. The purpose of this study is to analyze the relationship between corporate social responsibility, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty, thereby elucidating the impact of CSR on customer satisfaction and loyalty. Furthermore, this study aims to emphasize the importance of corporate social responsibility and promote the proliferation of CSR practices in the maritime transportation sector. In the scope of the research, the survey technique, as the primary data collection method, was employed. The survey was conducted online among 187 export companies, members of the Aegean and Marmara Exporters' Associations, which are among the most significant customers of container line operators. The data were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) version 22.0. Statistical analysis methods used in this study: frequency analysis, normality analysis, reliability analysis, ANOVA, and linear regression analysis. The research findings revealed that the CSR activities of container line operator businesses have a positive impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty, and a significant relationship exists between them. Additionally, a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty was observed. Moreover, it was noted that the perceived CSR varied according to the demographic characteristics of businesses.

Keywords: Container line operators; corporate social responsibility (CSR); customer satisfaction; customer loyalty; maritime logistics

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, as production capacity has increased, the ability of businesses to sustain their existence has become contingent on factors beyond profitability. Moreover, changes in environmental conditions and social structures have gradually shaped a conscious consumer profile, diverging from traditional norms. This has led to a consumer perception where social and environmental awareness is as prominent as economic conditions. Additionally, it has fostered an expectation for businesses to be responsible and accountable to all stakeholders. The intention of consumers to make purchases has also begun to be influenced by this perception, placing significant responsibilities on businesses. This shift has significantly altered the conditions for survival in the competitive environment for businesses.

Under the guise of corporate social responsibility (CSR), a new dimension has emerged, reshaping the relationship between businesses and customers. In this new paradigm, CSR has evolved from a strategy adopted by businesses to gain competitive advantage to becoming a necessity with significant environmental and social impacts. CSR redirects management policies that were traditionally based solely on economic concerns towards ethical, environmental, and societal concepts on a voluntary basis. In other words, social responsibility entails a business adopting a strategy and policy that aligns with ethical, environmental, and societal expectations of both internal and external stakeholders. It also focuses on satisfying the internal and external environment of the business (Demir and Songür, 1999: 151). Nowadays, many companies are restructuring their management and operations under the umbrella of corporate social responsibility. In recent years, increasing environmental and social crises have elevated CSR policies to higher priorities on the business agenda. Sensitivity not only to meeting specific needs but also to societal and environmental issues and the CSR projects developed in response to them, along with a business's approach to employee rights and its relationship with stakeholders, plays a critical role in shaping consumer preferences.

In light of all this information, this study aims to elucidate the relationship between corporate social responsibility activities of businesses and customer satisfaction and loyalty. The impact of corporate social responsibility activities of container line operators, one of the key players in maritime transportation, on customer satisfaction and loyalty has been analyzed in the study.

Members of the Aegean and Marmara Exporters' Associations, which operate in two regions with the highest foreign trade volume in Turkey, were selected as the sample for the study. In the following section, obtained through correlation, regression, and one-way ANOVA tests on the data obtained from the survey are examined, and the acceptance and rejection statuses of hypotheses are evaluated. In the discussion section, the compatibility of the findings with the literature is examined and interpreted in this section. Finally, the conclusion section summarizes the key findings and recommendations for the next studies in this field.

RESULTS

The normal distribution condition of the research variables was analyzed by examining the skewness and kurtosis coefficients obtained from the normality tests applied to these variables. In the literature, it is noted that if the skewness and kurtosis coefficients fall within the range of -2 to +2, the data can be considered to follow a normal distribution (George & Mallery, 2010). The table 1 displays the skewness and kurtosis values for the research variables. The values observed in the table indicate that the research variables meet the required criteria for normal distribution, which is essential for studies conducted in the field of social sciences. Therefore, parametric tests were used in the research.

Table 1

Skewness and Kurtosis values of the research variables

Variable	Skewness	Kurtosis
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)	-1,063	0,172
Customer Satisfaction (CS)	-1,305	1,586
Customer Loyalty (CL)	-1,045	0,591

From 181 participants, 16 responded "no" to the question "Do you use sea transportation in your foreign trade shipments?". Therefore, the data of these 16 participants were not considered. Consequently, the valid sample size was determined to be 165 (see in table 2).

Table 2

Case processing summary

	N	%
Valid	165	91,2
Excluded	16	8,8
Total	181	100

In the survey study, demographic data of the participants were obtained through the first part consisting of 9 questions. The participants' position, length of employment, industry sector, city of residence, number of employees, company age, export markets, and type of maritime transportation data were analyzed using the following frequency tables and graphics. According to Table 3, it has been determined that the majority of participants work as specialist in their companies. On the other words, 43.6% of the 181 participants work in specialist position. 39.8% of the participants, a significant portion, have mid-level experience between 5-10 years. There are relatively new businesses in the sample, with the majority of businesses, 44.2%, having been in operation for 20 years or more. It was analyzed that the largest share of the participating companies' business sizes was in small businesses with 33.7%.

Table 3

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

		Frequency	%
Position	Specialist	79	43,6
	Assistant Specialist	15	8,3
	Manager	48	26,5
	Deputy Manager	18	9,9
	Other	21	11,6
Length of Employment	1-5	58	32
	5-10	72	39,8
	10-15	35	19,3
	15-20	16	8,8
Company Age	3 years or less	8	4,4
	4 to 9 years	45	24,9
	10 to 19 years	48	26,5

	20 years and more	80	44,2
Company Scale	Micro Enterprises (0-9)	15	8,3
	Small Enterprises (10-49)	61	33,7
	Medium-sized Enterprises (50-249)	48	26,5
	Large Enterprises (250 or more)	57	31,5
Total		181	100

Overall, the Table 4 illustrates the diversity of industries represented among the companies surveyed, with a significant portion involved in minerals and natural stones, textile, fresh fruit and vegetable, and other sectors. The largest category, with 25.4% of companies falling into various other industries. Among the specified sectors, minerals and natural stones has a significant proportion, 17.1%, of companies operate in this industry. The sector with the lowest rate is the leather and leather products sector. Only 0.6% of companies operate in this sector.

Table 4

Distribution of industries which companies operated in

Industry	Frequency	%
Ferrous and Non-Ferrous Metals	8	4,4
Leather and Leather Products	1	0,6
Apparel	7	3,9
Cereal, Pulse, Oil Seeds	5	2,8
Minerals and Natural Stones	31	17,1
Furniture, Paper, and Forest	2	1,1
Fisheries and Animal Products	15	8,3
Textile	21	11,6
Fresh Fruit and Vegetable	27	14,9
Olive and Olive Oil	18	9,9

Other	46	25,4
Total	181	100

As the Table 5 shows, the respondent companies operate in a variety of export markets. The majority of companies, 92.3%, has a significant focus on European markets. Also, the results indicate a significant presence of companies targeting the Middle East region for their exports. While lower compared to other regions, there is still a notable proportion of companies exporting to Africa.

Table 5

In which export markets does your company operate?

Export Market	Frequency	%
the Middle East	102	56,4
USA	71	39,2
Africa	31	17,1
Europe	167	92,3
Asia	39	21,5
Russia and Turkic Republics	90	49,7
Far East	46	25,4

81.2% of the businesses prefer the container shipping for their foreign trade transportation. This means that the majority of companies rely on container shipping for their overseas trade. Ro-Ro transportation was the second most preferred maritime transportation method among the participants with a rate of 52.5%. The results are demonstrated in the Table 6.

Table 6

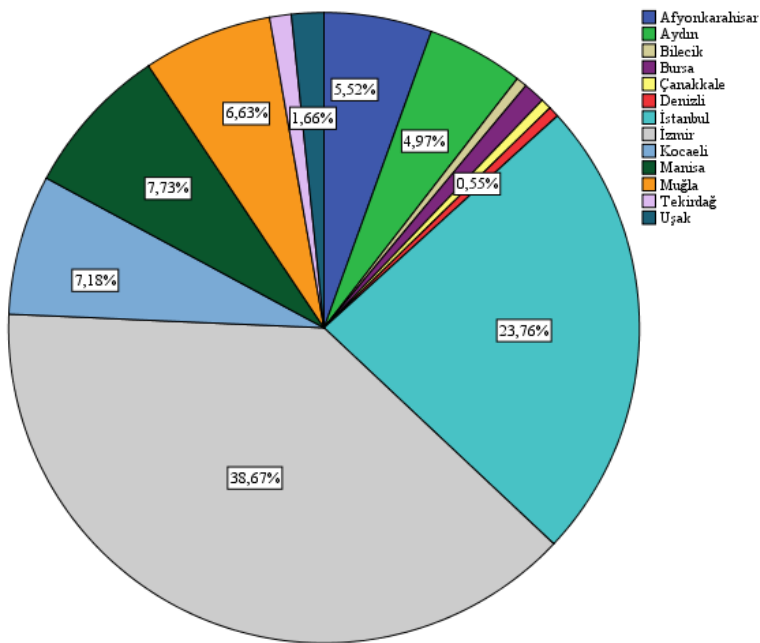
Which type of maritime transportation do you use for your foreign trade transportation?

Types of Maritime Transportation	Frequency	%
Container	147	81,2
Ro-Ro	95	52,5
Bulk Cargo	32	17,7
Others	9	5

The Figure 1 provides an overview of the demographic distribution of the companies that participated in your thesis survey, highlighting the geographic concentration of respondents in major urban centers of Turkey. The companies are primarily located in urban areas of Turkey, with a concentration in major cities such as İstanbul, İzmir, Manisa, and Kocaeli. İstanbul and İzmir are the most represented cities, accounting for 23.8% and 38.7% of the respondents, respectively. Other cities such as Afyonkarahisar, Aydın, Bursa, Çanakkale, Denizli, Muğla, Tekirdağ, and Uşak are also represented, although to a lesser extent.

Figure 1

Pie chart for cities which company operates in



As shown in Table 7, validity and reliability tests were applied to the three scales which are corporate social responsibility (CSR), customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty used in this study. According to the results of exploratory factor analysis, the CSR scale has 2 dimensions, and the customer satisfaction and customer loyalty scales have 1 dimension each. Additionally, all scales have a good reliability since it is higher than 0.80 (Field, 2009: 679).

Table 7

The Results of Validity and Reliability Tests

Scale	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO)	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)	0,954	0,956	19
Customer Satisfaction (CS)	0,843	0,859	5
Customer Loyalty (CL)	0,795	0,895	4

In this study, simple linear regression and correlation analysis were used to test the hypotheses within the scope of the research. Pearson Correlation Analysis was used to determine the relationship between Corporate Social Responsibility, Customer Satisfaction, and Customer Loyalty (H1, H2, and H3). Pearson correlation coefficients, means, standard deviations, and correlation values for the research variables were calculated and interpreted for correlation analysis. The findings obtained are shown in the Table 8. Also, simple linear regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses (H4, H5) explaining the change of the independent variable (CSR) in the dependent variables (CS and CL). The correlation and regression analyze used in the hypothesis testing and their results are explained below, respectively.

Table 8

The mean and standard deviation values for all variables

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)	78,05	13,315	165
Customer Satisfaction (CS)	20,38	3,818	165
Customer Loyalty (CL)	16,41	3,322	165

H1: There is a significant relationship between CSR activities of container line operator businesses and customer satisfaction.

A strong level of positive correlation ($r=0.841$) was found between perceived CSR and customer satisfaction according to the Table 9, which is significant at the $p<0.05$ level. This means that corporate social responsibility activities of container line operator enhance customer satisfaction. On other hand, they increase together significantly and with a strong relationship. According to the result of correlation analysis, the hypothesis 1 is accepted.

Table 9

The relationship between perceived CSR and customer satisfaction

		Customer Satisfaction (CS)
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)	Pearson r	,841*
	p	,000
	n	165

Note. The correlation is significant at the $p<0.01$ level.

H4: CSR activities of container line operators affect customer satisfaction.

If the p-value obtained for the model is less than 0.05, it indicates that the regression coefficient is not equal to 0, implying that the relationship between the two variables is statistically significant, and there exists a linear relationship between them. On the other hand, the model's indicator is expressed as R^2 , where a value closer to 1 indicates a better model (Kılıç, 2013: 90).

As a result of the analysis of the first regression model established to show the effect of perceived CSR on customer satisfaction, it is seen that the model*1 is statistically significant ($\text{sig.}<0,05$). In other words, CSR significantly influences customer satisfaction in a positive direction. An increase in CSR leads to a significant increase in customer satisfaction, indicating a positive relationship. The determination coefficient (R^2), calculated as the square of the coefficient of correlation, explains how much of the change in dependent variable is due to the independent variable (Can, 2016: 373). This implies that 71% of customer satisfaction might be attributed to CSR activities.

In the regression equation, coefficients a and b denote regression coefficients, where X1 stands for the independent variable, namely corporate social responsibility. Yi represents the dependent variable, which encompasses customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Coefficient a indicates the value of the dependent variable when the independent variable's value is zero. Coefficient b demonstrates the degree to which variable X1 elucidates the dependent variable (Sak, 2019: 80). The relationship of regression model*1 is explained by the formula as $y=1,56+0,24x$. The data for this regression model are shown in the Table 10.

Table 10

The regression model between perceived CSR and customer satisfaction

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,841 ^a	,707	,706	2,071

Note. Independent Variable: Corporate Social Responsibility

Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1691,500	1	1691,500	394,190	,000 ^b
	Residual	699,445	163	4,291		
	Total	2390,945	164			

Coefficients ^a								
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95,0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	1,557	0,962		1,619	0,107	-0,342	3,456
	Corporate Social Responsibility	0,241	0,012	0,841	19,85	0	0,217	0,265

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction

H2: There is a significant relationship between CSR activities of container line operator businesses and customer loyalty.

The correlation between CSR and customer loyalty is shown in the Table 11. A strong positive ($r=0,831$) and significant ($p<0,05$) relationship was found between CSR activities of container line operators and customer loyalty. In other words, perceived CSR and customer loyalty increase significantly and with a strong relationship. The result of correlation analysis between CSR and customer loyalty indicates that the hypothesis 2 is accepted.

Table 11

The relationship between CSR and customer loyalty

		Customer Loyalty (CL)
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)	Pearson r	,831*
	p	,000
	n	165

*The correlation is significant at the $p<0.01$ level.

H5: CSR activities of container line operators affect customer loyalty.

The regression analysis is conducted to test of hypothesis 5. The table 30 shows the results of regression analysis between perceived CSR and customer loyalty. As a result of the analysis of the second model established to show the effect of CSR on customer loyalty, it is seen that the model*2 is statistically significant ($\text{sig}.<0,05$). CSR has a positive and significant impact on customer loyalty. The Table 12 determines that enhancing CSR results in a notable increase in customer loyalty. The variance explained by the variables on each other is 69%. In other words, 69% of customer loyalty can be explained by perceived CSR.

Table 12

The regression model between CSR and customer loyalty

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
2	,831 ^a	,690	,688	1,856

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
2	Regression	1248,388	1	1248,388	362,460	,000 ^b
	Residual	561,406	163	3,444		
	Total	1809,794	164			

Note. Independent Variable: Corporate Social Responsibility
Dependent Variable: Customer Loyalty

Coefficients ^a								
	Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95,0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
2	(Constant)	,234	,862		,271	,787	-1,468	1,935
	Corporate Social Responsibility	,207	,011	,831	19,038	,000	,186	,229

H3: There is a significant relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.

A strongly positive relationship ($r=0,766$) that is statistically significant ($p<0,05$) was observed between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. This indicates that participants' customer satisfaction and loyalty increase significantly and are strongly correlated. The variance explained by the variables on each other is 59%. It means that 59% of customer loyalty may be attributed to customer satisfaction. The results of correlation analysis confirm the hypothesis 3 is accepted. This correlation is illustrated in the Table 13.

Table 13

The relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty

		Customer Loyalty (CL)
Customer Satisfaction (CS)	Pearson r	,766*
	p	,000
	n	165

*The correlation is significant at the $p < 0.01$ level.

H6: There is a significant difference between the foreign trade sector and the CSR activities of container line operators.

One-way ANOVA is a parametric statistical analysis method used to determine the difference between the averages of more than two independent groups (Can, 2006: 147). The survey data includes 13 independent groups belonging to the foreign trade sector. Hypothesis 6 was based on the evaluation of the relationship of these groups with CSR. For this reason, one-way ANOVA analysis was used to test the hypothesis. Firstly, the Levene's test is analyzed to test for homogeneity of variance. The significance value is less than 0.05 means that the assumption is violated. (Field, 2006: 442). That is, the p value should be higher than 0.05 for the hypothesis to be accepted. According to our results the significance value ($P=,177$) was greater than 0.05 according to the text of homogeneity of variances, the variances were distributed homogeneously.

Secondly, the results of ANOVA In the Table 14 are evaluated. P value is less than 0.05, it means there is a significant difference between perceived CSR and the foreign trade sector. CSR activities of container line operators differ significantly among foreign trade sectors. When comparing Ferrous and Non-Ferrous Metals to Minerals and Natural Stones, the mean difference is -30,523 with a standard error of 4,525, and the p-value is .000, suggesting a statistically significant difference between these industries. In summary, significant differences are observed between Ferrous and Non-Ferrous Metals and several other industries (Minerals and Natural Stones, Fisheries and Animal Products, Textile, Fresh Fruit and Vegetable, Olive and Olive Oil), as indicated by the p-values being less than .05, while no significant differences are found between Ferrous and Non-Ferrous Metals and Apparel, Cereal, Pulse, Oil Seeds, or other industries. As a result, the hypothesis 6 is accepted.

Table 14

ANOVA test for corporate social responsibility based on the sector

Test of Homogeneity of Variances			
Corporate Social Responsibility			
Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
1,458 ^a	8	155	,177

ANOVA					
Corporate Social Responsibility					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	15412,981	9	1712,553	19,429	,000
Within Groups	13662,631	155	88,146		
Total	29075,612	164			

(I) What type of industry does the company operate in?		Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Ferrous and Non-Ferrous Metals	Apparel	-5,033	5,685	,999	-27,77	17,70
	Cereal, Pulse, Oil Seeds	-17,950	6,298	,427	-43,13	7,23
	Minerals and Natural Stones	-30,523*	4,525	,000	-48,61	-12,43
	Fisheries and Animal Products	-32,133*	4,848	,000	-51,52	-12,75
	Textile	-31,450*	4,694	,000	-50,22	-12,68
	Fresh Fruit and Vegetable	-30,508*	4,585	,000	-48,84	-12,18
	Olive and Olive Oil	-29,811*	4,746	,000	-48,79	-10,83

	Other	-12,559	4,460	,445	-30,39	5,27
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H7: There is a significant difference between the size of the foreign trade enterprise and the CSR activities of container line operator enterprises.

The Table 14 presents the results of multiple comparisons for the variable "Corporate Social Responsibility" across different categories based on the number of employees in the company. The significance value ($P=0,024$) is not higher than 0,05. Since homogeneous distribution of variances could not be achieved, the Welch test results were taken into account. There exists a noteworthy difference ($P=,028 < 0,05$) in CSR activities among container line operators concerning the size of foreign trade enterprises. CSR initiatives of container line operators demonstrate significant divergence across various scales of foreign trade enterprises. Overall, the results indicate that there are significant differences in CSR perception between large enterprises and both small and large enterprises. However, there are no significant differences in CSR perception between micro enterprises and other categories, and between small and medium-sized enterprises. According to Welch test results, the hypothesis 7 is accepted.

Table 14

ANOVA test for corporate social responsibility based on the company scale

Test of Homogeneity of Variances			
Corporate Social Responsibility			
Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
3,238	3	161	,024

Robust Tests of Equality of Means				
Corporate Social Responsibility				
	Statistic ^a	df1	df2	Sig.
Welch	3,473	3	31,396	,028
a. Asymptotically F distributed.				

Multiple Comparisons

(I) How many employees does your company have?	(J) How many employees does your company have?	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Micro Enterprises (0-9)	Small Enterprises (10-49)	-,28571	,27547	,733	-1,1556	,5841
	Medium-sized Enterprises (50-249)	-,29920	,27645	,709	-1,1696	,5712
	Large Enterprises (250 or more)	,09928	,28263	,984	-,7751	,9736
Small Enterprises (10-49)	Micro Enterprises (0-9)	,28571	,27547	,733	-,5841	1,1556
	Medium-sized Enterprises (50-249)	-,01348	,12183	1,000	-,3319	,3049
	Large Enterprises (250 or more)	,38500*	,13525	,027	,0318	,7382
Medium-sized Enterprises (50-249)	Micro Enterprises (0-9)	,29920	,27645	,709	-,5712	1,1696
	Small Enterprises (10-49)	,01348	,12183	1,000	-,3049	,3319
	Large Enterprises (250 or more)	,39848*	,13725	,023	,0398	,7572
Large Enterprises (250 or more)	Micro Enterprises (0-9)	-,09928	,28263	,984	-,9736	,7751
	Small Enterprises (10-49)	-,38500*	,13525	,027	-,7382	-,0318
	Medium-sized Enterprises (50-249)	-,39848*	,13725	,023	-,7572	-,0398

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

DISCUSSION

In this section, the results obtained through the statistical analyzes carried out within the scope of the research are summarized by establishing connections with similar studies in the literature. This study aimed to investigate the impact of corporate social responsibility practices of container line operators on customer satisfaction and loyalty by examining and analyzing seven hypotheses developed below. Whether the hypotheses determined in this research were confirmed or not is given in the Table 15. According to our findings, all hypotheses are accepted. The accepted hypotheses suggest that there are significant relationships between CSR activities, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty within container line operator businesses. The findings indicate that CSR initiatives positively impact both customer satisfaction and loyalty, highlighting the importance of integrating responsible business practices into operational strategies. Moreover, the observed relationships between the foreign trade sector, the size of enterprises, and CSR activities emphasize the need for tailored approaches to CSR implementation based on industry dynamics and company size.

Table 15

The analysis results of hypotheses

H1: There is a significant relationship between CSR activities of container line operator businesses and customer satisfaction.	ACCEPT
H2: There is a significant relationship between CSR activities of container line operator businesses and customer loyalty.	ACCEPT
H3: There is a significant relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.	ACCEPT
H4: CSR activities of container line operators affect customer satisfaction.	ACCEPT
H5: CSR activities of container line operators affect customer loyalty.	ACCEPT
H6: There is a significant difference between the foreign trade sector and the CSR activities of container line operators.	ACCEPT
H7: There is a significant difference between the size of the foreign trade enterprise and the CSR activities of container line operator enterprises.	ACCEPT

The correlation and regression models established to test the hypotheses put forward in the research reveal significant findings. According to the correlation analysis conducted in the study, it was found that CSR has a positive effect on customer satisfaction. The results of the regression analysis indicate that perceived CSR has a significant impact on customer satisfaction. In many CSR studies conducted in different sectors, the impact of CSR on customer satisfaction has been evaluated, and meaningful results have been obtained. Senthikumar et al. (2011), Islam et al. (2020), Kurt (2021), and Agyei et al. (2021) evaluated the mediating role of customer satisfaction in their studies conducted in different sectors and concluded that CSR has an impact on customer satisfaction. In his CSR study in the field of the Turkish airline market (Kurt, 2021: 219), he revealed a positive relationship between CSR and customer satisfaction. Luo and Bhattacharya (2006), on the other hand, evaluated CSR initiatives from the perspective of financial performance by examining the role of customer satisfaction. According to the research findings, CSR has been interpreted as a factor that enhances customer satisfaction. Sak (2019: 3), with evaluating the role of CSR activities of a company operating in the coffee sector on customer loyalty, concluded that the social responsibility activities undertaken by businesses increase satisfaction and loyalty towards the company in the eyes of the society. Based on this, it was observed that the result obtained in this study was consistent with the literature.

Despite the fact that this study differs in many respects from prior investigations, the findings support the results of earlier studies on the relationship between CSR and customer loyalty. Within the scope of the research, the effect of corporate social responsibility on customer loyalty was tried to be tested and information supporting the literature was obtained. Diallo & Lambecchin (2016: 2), in their study examining customer loyalty in terms of retailers' social discount communication, concluded that the customer loyalty policy has a direct and indirect positive impact on loyalty. Similarly, Ofluoğlu & Atılğan (2014: 317) demonstrated the impact of corporate social responsibility projects of a textile company on customer loyalty. In his CSR study in the field of Islamic banks, Aziz (2022: 37) also reached the conclusion that CSR significantly and positively affects customer loyalty. In a study conducted in a different sector, Aydın & Erdoğan (2016: 11) examined the effect of CSR activities of restaurant establishments on customer loyalty and found that the CSR activities undertaken by these establishments positively affect customer loyalty. According to the findings of Yenliç's (2017: 77) study

investigating the impact of Migros store's corporate social responsibility projects on customer loyalty, it similarly argues that corporate social responsibility initiatives positively affect consumer loyalty. In academic studies evaluating the impact of CSR on customer satisfaction and loyalty, Chung et al. (2015), Shin & Thai (2015), Servera-Frances & Piqueras-Tomas (2018), Ali et al. (2021), and Leclercq-Machado et al. (2022) have demonstrated the impact of CSR on both customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.

In the literature, it is accepted that customer satisfaction and customer loyalty are different concepts, but the relationship between them has been revealed by many studies. Despite the disparity between the pursuit of satisfaction and loyalty, it is essential for customer loyalty (Oliver, 1999: 33). The study utilized correlation analysis to examine the connection between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. The analysis uncovered a robust positive relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. The results of the study indicate that customer satisfaction significantly influences brand loyalty. Bayuk and Küçük (2007: 291) confirmed the relationship between customer loyalty and customer satisfaction in their study, asserting that customer satisfaction is a necessary element for gaining customer loyalty. As another study on the GSM sector, Çalkaya (2019: 83) contends that customer satisfaction is the primary factor influencing customer loyalty. Based on the research conducted, it is observed that the findings of this study are consistent with the literature.

When evaluating businesses' corporate social responsibility activities, one important factor to consider is the demographic characteristics of customers. According to the study by Koçoğlu & Aksoy (2017: 89), which examines whether the perception of corporate social responsibility varies according to demographic variables, factors such as education, income level, occupation, etc., influence consumers' perceptions of CSR. Therefore, CSR perception may vary according to these characteristics. The perceived CSR among the foreign trade companies participating in the research was analyzed using a one-way ANOVA test to determine whether it varied according to the sector and company size they belong to. According to the results, it was revealed that the perception of CSR among export firms varied depending on the sector and size of the company. This result confirms the findings of this study in the literature.

CONCLUSION

In recent years, technological advancements along with increasing social and environmental crises have imposed various responsibilities on businesses, the fundamental unit of the economy, at both national and international levels. During this period, issues such as environmental problems, sustainability, and efficient resource utilization have gained even more significance. Businesses, regarded as structures that benefit all stakeholders beyond economic profit, have increasingly embraced corporate social responsibility (CSR) principles. The growing awareness of environmental and societal values among conscientious citizens and consumers has become prominent in their purchasing intentions. Consequently, in the increasingly competitive business environment, it has become inevitable for businesses to adopt CSR strategies. Corporate social responsibility not only allows businesses to gain advantages in terms of economic and corporate reputation but also establishes a mutually beneficial relationship with stakeholders.

The outcome of the research indicates that corporate social responsibility practices play a decisive role in the maritime transportation industry, similar to other sectors. The perception of CSR influences the preferences of foreign trade companies for container shipping operators. In the perception of CSR, not only environmental concerns but also economic, social, and ethical factors are involved. According to the survey results, the level of environmental and social awareness of logistics companies and the voluntary projects they undertake in this regard positively affect customer satisfaction and, consequently, customer loyalty, besides the diversity and quality of services provided by logistics companies. Similarly, factors such as fair working conditions and benefits provided to employees and occupational safety enhance the reputation of the company and influence customer preferences. Management strategies such as transparent communication with customers, honesty, and commitment to ethical values are among the characteristics that export companies pay attention to in the logistics companies they work with. Additionally, a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty has been identified. Thus, companies embracing corporate social responsibility principles increase customer satisfaction and, consequently, customer loyalty and become more preferred by customers. Numerous studies in the literature also demonstrate that corporate social

responsibility has a significantly positive impact on customer satisfaction and resulting customer loyalty. The results obtained in this study are confirmed by the literature.

In conclusion, it is important for businesses today to develop management strategies based on corporate social responsibility principles in order to gain advantages over other businesses and create differentiation. In the current economic structure, socially responsible businesses are prioritized in conscientious consumer preferences. Therefore, it has become a necessity for businesses to conduct their economic activities in accordance with social and environmental awareness and ethical principles. In the maritime transportation sector, one of the most important sectors contributing to the world economy, the emphasis on CSR strategies has become inevitable for customer satisfaction, loyalty, and corporate reputation. Embracing CSR strategies more and prioritizing social responsibility projects will contribute to the development of customer relationships and economic advantages for companies. Future research can provide valuable insights into optimizing CSR strategies in the shipping industry by examining specific mechanisms that affect customer perceptions and behaviors regarding CSR activities in more detail.

In this study, there are some limitations. One of these limitations is that the research consists of the foreign trade companies only in the Aegean and Marmara regions. Also, the participation especially is intense in certain cities which are Istanbul and Izmir. It is anticipated that applying the study in different regions will provide more comprehensive results. In addition, contact information of companies was obtained from the exporters' association websites, but in some of them this information is not accessible. For this reason, the survey form could be sent to fewer companies than targeted. As a result, the determined number of samples, 370, could not be reached.

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