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The Influence of Environment-Oriented Corporate Social Responsibility Practices on Customer Loyalty: The Mediating Effect of Trust and Commitment as Evidenced in Tanzania Small and Medium Tour Operators

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Abstract

This study examines tourists' perceptions of how environmental corporate social responsibility (ECSR) practices undertaken by small and medium-sized tour operators (SMTOs) influence customer loyalty in Tanzania. Drawing on commitment–trust theory, it also investigates the mediating roles of trust and commitment. Data were collected through self-administered structured questionnaires from 305 tourists whose trips were arranged by Tanzanian SMTOs. Participants were selected using systematic intercept sampling, and the proposed relationships were tested through partial least squares path modelling in SmartPLS 3. The findings indicate that tourists perceive ECSR practices as having significant positive effects on trust, commitment, and loyalty. Trust and commitment complementarily mediate the relationship between perceived ECSR and loyalty. The study extends understanding of tourists' responses to environmental responsibility among smaller tour operators and suggests that SMTOs can use ECSR practices to strengthen customer relationships and loyalty.

Keywords: Environment-oriented CSR, Customer Loyalty, Relationship Quality, Trust, Commitment.

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SDG alignment
SDG 8: sustainable tourism growth
SDG 12 :Responsible tourism practices
SDG 14 :Marine conservation
SDG 15 :Ecosystem conservation

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Introduction

Environment-oriented corporate social responsibility (ECSR) has been a topic of interest to illustrate its role in the sustainable development of tourism. Moreover, ECSR has been accepted as a potentially valuable approach in building long-term relationships with both internal and external stakeholders of the tourism industry which is highly dominated by the small and medium tour- operators (SMTOs (Liu et al., 2019; Rashid et al., 2015).

The mushrooming and increasing number of small and medium tourist operators (SMTOs) in the tourism industry has increased competition (Nikulina, 2017), making them strategically innovative in terms of ECSR. However, for SMTOs striving to fulfil the needs of tourists, there have been increased problems like air pollution and loss of biodiversity (Chan, 2011). On the other hand, more and more tourists have begun to buy from SMTOs which are inclined and subscribe to ECSR practices (Gürlek et al., 2017). In this context the perceived ECSR commands a significant place in terms of competitiveness on the market, relationship quality trust, relationship quality commitment, and customer loyalty. Moreover, customer loyalty appears as a key factor that directly increases market share and profits and it is a tool to retain customers for the survival of business (Chaudhuri et al., 2021).

The literature on the CSR–loyalty association has been thoroughly studied. However, various of the existing studies on the CSR–customer loyalty relationship focused on developed countries (Latif et al., 2020), and some studies conducted in developing countries have focused on investigating large corporations (Raman et al., 2012).

Furthermore, existing studies have focused on studying the role of ECSR in achieving customer loyalty in the context of airlines, hotels, casinos, restaurants, food chains, coffee shops, supermarkets, banking, and shopping malls (Gürlek et al., 2017). Whether CSR plays an influential role in shaping the ECSR–loyalty relationship in SMTOs has rarely been investigated, particularly in developing countries. In particular, previous studies on the relationship between ECSR and loyalty only measured customer loyalty as a separate aspect between attitudinal and behavioural measurements instead of a composite loyalty (a combination of behavioural and attitudinal measurements) as frequently recommended by various studies (Khan & Fatma, 2019; Servera-Francés & Piqueras-Tomás, 2019).

Despite some studies on the relationship between CSR and customer loyalty having investigated one or more mediating variables—company evaluation, identity attractiveness of brand, customer-brand relationship identification, and corporate image (Muflih, 2021); stakeholder associations, attitude, and identification (Sen et al., 2006); and perceived service quality (Lacap et al., 2021)—other scholars, including Morgan and Hunt (1994), established in their trust-commitment theory that trust and commitment are key success variables of relationship marketing, for which this study applied. Commitment and trust have been applied as key mediating variables in studies between CSR and customer loyalty, as they are responsible for relational outcomes (Huo et al. 2022). Further, it has been a call of many scholars to include these mediators in CSR to CL-related studies (Iglesias et al., 2020).

Petrick (2004) asserts that SMTOs will be guaranteed by both more revenue and an opportunity to establish closer relationships with the tourists when tourists can be convinced to buy services from the same SMTOs and return to a destination. Various empirical studies that have been carried out show that tourists perceive ECSR to have an influence on customer loyalty (Liu et al., 2014). The aim of this study was to determine the influence of tourists perceived ECSR on customer loyalty and the mediating effect of trust and commitment in the Tanzanian SMTOs. It is believed that the results from the study will contribute to literature as well as assist in policymaking.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Theoretical foundation and conceptual model

In the tourism industry, environmental corporate social responsibility (ECSR) involves tourism businesses voluntarily implementing environmental measures that exceed legal obligations (Montañés-Del Río et al., 2025). Practically, ECSR in tourism may include eco-friendly activities such as recycling and waste management programs and preserving biodiversity (Dłużewska & Giampiccoli, 2024). Tourist loyalty manifests in tourists consistently choosing a particular SMTO, demonstrated by repeat visits, positive referrals, recommendations to others, and a reduced likelihood of switching to rival SMTO companies. Drawing on the commitment–trust theory, tourism SMTOs that credibly engage in ECSR are perceived as ethical, responsible, and trustworthy actors that prioritise the long-term well-being of tourists, host communities, and the environment (Jha & Jha, 2025). These perceptions strengthen tourists' trust, satisfaction, emotional attachment, and commitment, thereby increasing their intention to revisit, recommend, and remain loyal to the destination or tourism brand. Consequently, ECSR is expected to positively influence tourist loyalty, as environmentally responsible practices enhance relationship quality and trust (Condori-Chura et al., 2025). The conceptual framework in Figure 1 portrays the relationship between how tourists perceive ECSR and lead to trust and commitment, which ultimately build customer loyalty.

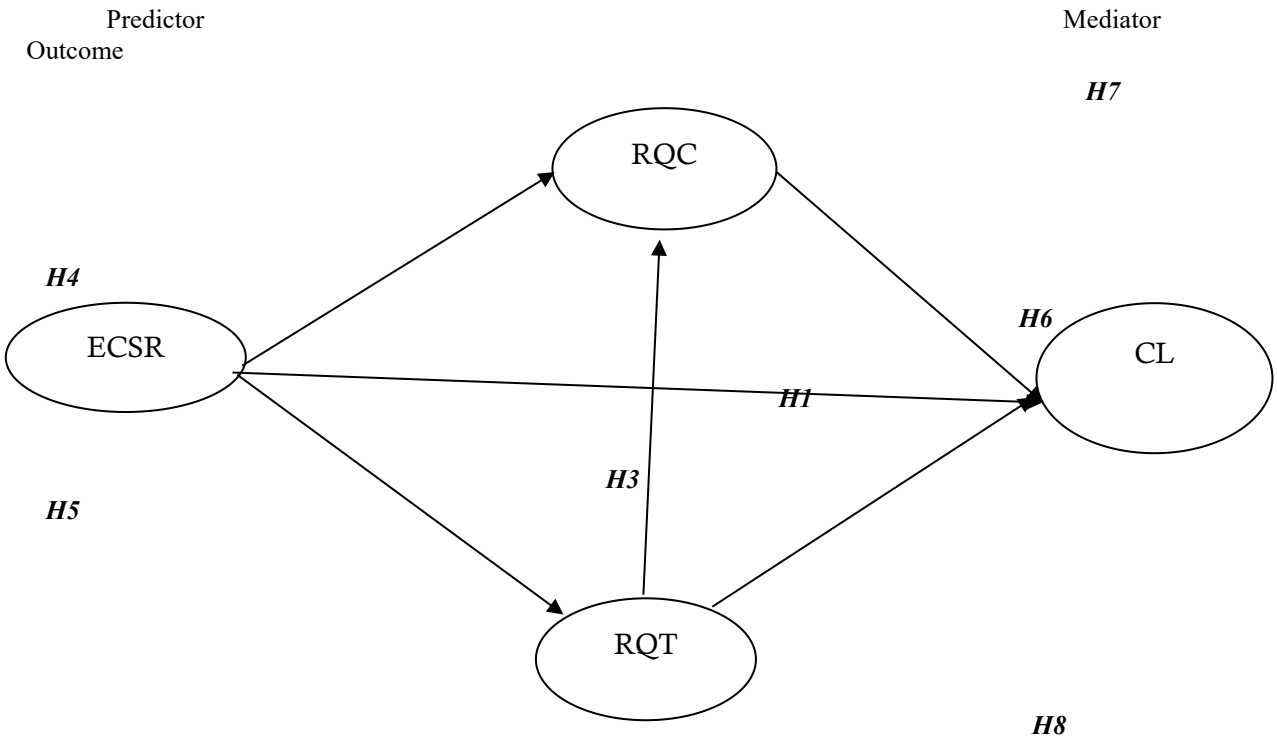


Figure.1 Conceptual Framework

The Effect of ECSR on Customer Loyalty

Recent studies indicate that perceived ECSR is a significant predictor of customer loyalty; demonstrating a positive direct effect among hotel guests (Dedat & Rodrigues, 2025). This finding supports the proposition that visible environmental initiatives, such as waste reduction, can promote repeat patronage. However, there are inconsistent findings regarding the mechanisms by which ECSR practices translates into loyalty. In a study of hotel guests, ECSR did not directly influence customer satisfaction; rather, its effect on satisfaction was mediated through customer–company identification and trust. This suggests that ECSR may not inherently generate loyalty unless guests perceive these practices as credible with the hotel. Consequently, the relationship between ECSR and customer loyalty is context-dependent and may be improved by mediating factors such as commitment and trust (Mesfin et al., 2024). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Environmental CSR positively influences customer loyalty.

The Effect of ECSR on Relationship Quality Commitment (RQC)

Customer commitment is an enduring psychological attachment to a valued service provider and a willingness to sustain it (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In the tourism context, this might translate to a desire to rebook with the same SMTO and a sense of alignment with its environmental philosophies. Based on the commitment–trust theory, tourists may perceive the relationship as more significant and worth preserving when SMTOs engage in sustainable ECSR practices (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

Various studies in tourism indirectly support this connection. Khairy et al. (2023) found that perceived ECSR enhanced green perceived value and green attitudes among customers of travel agencies and hotels in Egypt. Further, Abdou et al. (2022) associated environmentally sustainable hotel practices with green perceived value and customer citizenship behavior. These results imply that environmental responsibility might encourage commitment. Moreover, Latif et al. (2020) identified a positive correlation between perceived environmental CSR and affective commitment in a different service setting. It is therefore hypothesized that

H2: Environmental CSR positively influences relationship quality commitment.

The Effect of ECSR on Relationship Quality Trust (RQT)

Customer trust is a tourist's willingness to rely on a tour operator, based on expectations that the operator is capable, reliable, and acts with integrity and goodwill (Li & Yang, 2022). It differs from commitment: trust concerns confidence in the operator, whereas commitment concerns the desire to maintain the relationship. The commitment–trust theory suggests that ECSR can strengthen trust when SMTOs engage in ECSR practices—such as conserving destinations and acting responsibly rather than pursuing profit at the expense of tourists (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Sung et al., 2021).

The cited studies support this expectation, although they examined different outcomes and settings. Fatawu et al. (2025) reported a positive association between environmental sustainability initiatives and customer trust in Ghana's hospitality and tourism industry, while Hoang and Vu (2025) linked green hotel practices to customer trust. Khairy et al. (2023) found favourable responses to perceived environmental CSR among Egyptian travel-agency and hotel customers. It therefore hypothesized that:

H3: Environmental CSR positively influences relationship quality trust.

The Effect of Relationship Quality Commitment on Customer Loyalty

Commitment refers to a customer's persistent desire to sustain a relationship deemed valuable. In the context of tourism or hospitality, this is significant because customers who perceive their connection with a provider as valuable are motivated to maintain it, rather than viewing each transaction as an independent decision. The commitment–trust theory posits that commitment is fundamental to sustaining successful relationships; when applied to this context, it implies that tourists with higher levels of commitment are more likely to revisit, continue patronizing, and recommend the provider (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Thus, commitment is distinct from customer loyalty: it pertains to the desire to maintain the relationship, whereas loyalty pertains to the favorable intentions or behaviors that may ensue.

Empirical evidence corroborates this hypothesis, particularly when commitment is rooted in attachment rather than dependence. Among customers of a repertory theater, Garbarino and Johnson (1999) found that commitment helped explain future intentions for customers with highly relational commitments. Fullerton (2003) found that commitment based on shared values and identification consistently positively affected service provider loyalty, whereas commitment based on switching costs had mixed effects. In a hotel setting, Koo et al. (2020) found that affective commitment was part of the relationship between loyalty program value and guest brand loyalty. Taken together, these findings support the hypothesis that:

H4: Relationship quality commitment positively influences customer loyalty.

The Effect of Relationship Quality Trust on Customer Loyalty

Trust is defined as a customer's confidence in a provider's reliability. Within this framework, trust serves as an antecedent to customer loyalty rather than being equal with it. Trust pertains to customers' expectations of the provider, while loyalty relates to their intention to maintain the relationship, repatronage, or recommend the provider. The commitment–trust theory explains how confidence in a relationship partner can facilitate ongoing exchanges (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

Empirical evidence supports the hypothesized positive effect. Loureiro and González (2008) demonstrated that trust positively influences loyalty among rural lodging tourists in Spain and Portugal. Similarly, Han and Hyun (2015) established a link between trust and the intention to revisit in medical tourism staff. Moreover, Rather et al. (2019) found that trust directly predicts hotel customers' loyalty. Collectively, these findings suggest that customers who trust a tourism provider are probably going to be loyal. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H5: Relationship quality trust positively influences customer loyalty.

The Effect of Relationship Quality Trust on Relationship Quality Commitment

Trust is defined as a tourist's confidence in the reliability and ethical conduct of a service provider, whereas commitment is the belief that maintaining the relationship is valuable (Rusmiati et al., 2024). These concepts represent distinct stages within the proposed relational framework. Tourists can reduce uncertainties regarding future travels and invest in the relationship when they trust the tour operators. Thus, the commitment–trust theory provides a foundation for predicting that trust will enhance commitment (Aydın, 2026).

Hospitality research supports this expectation. Li and Chang (2016) found that trust positively influenced relationship commitment among members of hospitality online social networks. Amoako et al. (2019) likewise reported a positive relationship between trust and commitment among hotel guests in Ghana. Because neither study examined customers of tour operators, the proposed effect remains to be tested in the present setting. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H6: Relationship quality trust positively influences relationship quality commitment.

The Mediation Effect of Relationship Quality Commitment

Customer commitment is proposed to explain how environmental corporate social responsibility (ECSR) may increase loyalty to a tour operator. The commitment–trust theory holds that customers work to preserve relationships they regard as valuable (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). When tourists view an operator's environmental practices as genuine and aligned with their values, those practices may foster an emotional attachment and a desire to continue the relationship. That attachment, in turn, may make tourists more likely to book with the SMTOs again and recommend it to others. The proposed pathway is therefore ECSR effect commitment and commitment effect customer loyalty, rather than an assumption that ECSR alone produces loyalty.

Some evidence supports parts of this pathway, but it does not fully confirm the mediation in the current tour-operator context. Mohammed and Al-Swidi (2021) found that among Malaysian hotel customers, affective commitment mediated the link between CSR activities, including environmental CSR. In service-provider relationships, Fullerton (2003) discovered that commitment positively affected loyalty. Thus, the indirect ECSR affect commitment and, in turn, the commitment drive loyalty. Thus,

H7: Customer commitment mediates the relationship between ECSR and customer loyalty.

The Mediation Effect of Relationship Quality Trust

Trust was suggested as a mediator because it offers an alternative route from environmental corporate social responsibility (ECSR) to customer loyalty, separate from commitment. While commitment relates to a tourist's emotional bond and desire to maintain a relationship, trust involves the belief that the tour operator is reliable and will behave responsibly (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Visible environmental actions, such as protecting destinations and openly sharing sustainability efforts, can give tourists reasons to trust the operator's behavior. This trust can reduce uncertainty about future trips, thus enhancing tourists' likelihood to book again or recommend the operator.

Research from environmentally certified hotels supports the trust pathway. Martínez García de Leaniz et al. (2019) found that an environmental CSR image positively impacted customers' trust, which in turn positively influenced their behavioral intentions. They noted that trust mediated the link between environmental CSR image and these intentions, while the direct link was not significant. Since hotel behavioral intentions do not equate to loyalty toward a tour operator, the indirect effect needs further exploration in this context. Therefore, this study proposes that:

H8 Trust mediates the relationship between ECSR and customer loyalty.

Method

A positivism philosophy, quantitative research approach, and cross-section design have been adopted due to the nature of the study, research problem, and objectives (Saunders et al., 2016). The current study is based on tourists who were found in Tanzanian touristic destinations of Kilimanjaro and Zanzibar and who were served by TATO and ZATO SMTO members. The study employed a systematic tourist-intercept sampling procedure. The procedure was used to select tourists at the selected locations of Marangu Gate at Kilimanjaro and Stone town in Zanzibar. Data were collected in the period between March and April 2020. Questionnaires were self-administered, whereby the first respondent was randomly selected, and thereafter every 3rd tourist was chosen as an additional element till the desired sample size was reached. A 5-point Likert scale from 1-Strongly Disagree to 5-Strongly Agree was used to increase response rate and avoid inconveniences among the tourists. The measurement items and their sources are provided in Appendix 1.

A sample size of 305 respondents was selected based on Comrey and Lee (1992) sample size selection method. The method has the following rule of thumb: less than 50 sample size is considered a weaker sample, 100 respondents as a weak sample, 200 respondents as sufficient, 300 as a good sample, a 500 sample is very good, and 1,000 respondents is excellent. The study estimated an overall CSR-to-loyalty model using respondents from both study locations. Previous tourism studies have estimated overall CSR–loyalty relationships using tourists drawn from multiple tourism locations, companies or hotel categories (Pham et al., 2025). While these earlier works guide our analysis, they do not confirm the equivalence of the two locations.

An assessment of skewness and kurtosis statistical analysis was done to test for normality, which was revealed to be non-normal since all the skewness and kurtosis values were not close to zero (Hair et al., 2027). Since the distribution of data was non-normal and since the structural model involved complex and various indicators, the Smart PLS3 Structural Equation Model (SEM) was applied based on recommendations by Hair et al. (2019). Table 1 shows the response rate.

Table 1: Response from Respondents

Response	Frequency/Rate
Total questionnaires distributed	350
Total questionnaires returned	320
Total useable questionnaires	305
Total questionnaire excluded	15
Total response rate	91%
Total response rate after data entry	87%

Source: Survey data

A higher response is essential for the reduction of non-response bias. According to Saldivar (2012), a response rate of 80 – 85% with in-person survey mode is good and adequate. The current study has a response rate of 87%, which is sufficient to proceed with the analysis.

To minimize the risk of common method bias, participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and informed that there were no right or wrong answers. The questionnaire was structured to present items assessing the predictor and outcome constructs in distinct sections. However, since all constructs were self-reported by the same individual at one time, these measures do not completely rule out the potential for common method bias (Saptoto et al., 2026).

Results

Respondent Profile

Table 2 provides the tourists (respondents) personal and demographic information about gender, age, marital status, nationality, education, income, and relationship duration with the SMTO.

Table 2: Profile of the Respondents

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	160	52.5
	Female	145	47.5
Age			
	15 – 35	192	62.9
	36 – Above	113	37.0
Marital Status	Married	122	40.0
	Single	183	60.0
Nationality	Tanzanian	239	78.4
	Non-Tanzanian	66	21.6
Education	Primary	27	8.9
	Secondary	93	30.5
	Post-Secondary	185	60.7
Income	TZS 0 - 500,000	61	20.0
	TZS 500,001 - 1,000,000	110	36.1
	TZS 1,000,001 and above	134	43.9
Relationship Duration	Below 1 Year	259	84.9
	Above 1 Year	46	15.1

Source: Survey data

Furthermore, the analysis of this study followed a two-step approach for reporting PLS-SEM results (Henseler et al., 2009). The measurement model assessment is the first step, and it involves the following activities, namely, examining individual item reliability and ascertaining internal item consistency. ascertaining convergent validity, and ascertaining discriminant validity. The second step is structural model assessment, which consists of the following activities: assessing the significance of the path coefficient, assessing the variance explanation of the endogenous construct (R2), determining the effect size (f2), and predictive relevance (Q2).

Measurement Model Assessment.

In this assessment, the following were observed: factor loadings, Cronbach 'alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE). The following were examined in discriminant validity: Fornell Larcker Criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). Figure 2, Table 3, and Table 4 show the results of

the assessed measurement model.

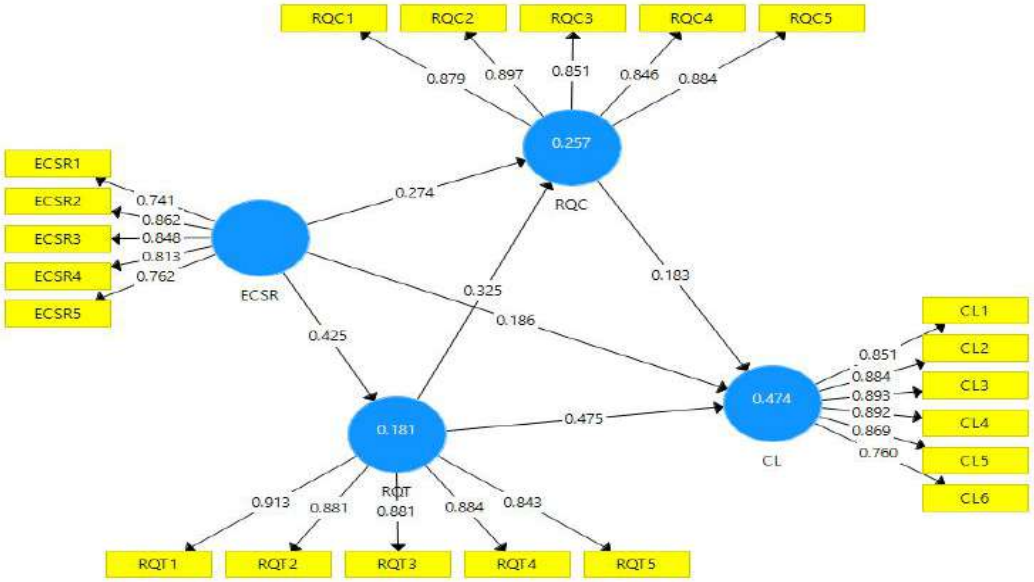


Figure 2. Measurement Model Assessment

Customer Loyalty (CL)was measured by 6 items (CL1, CL2, CL3, CL4, CL5, CL6), while Environment-oriented CSR (ECSR) was measured by 5 items (ECSR1, ECSR2, ECSR3, ECSR4, ECSR5), Commitment (RQC) was measured by 5 items (RQC1, RQC2, RQC3, RQC4, RQC5) while Trust (RQT) was measured by 5 items (RQT1, RQT2, RQT3, RQT4, RQT5).

Figure 3 contains the measurement model assessment before hypotheses testing. It shows the factor loadings of each item of all the constructs and R^2 value. All the factor loadings had more than 0.7. The score is more than the required from the rule of thumb that factor loadings should be more than 0.5 in order to attain acceptable level of convergent validity (Hair et al., 2010). Thus, convergent validity was attained in this study.

Table 3: Internal Consistency, Convergent Validity, Composite reliability, and AVE

Construct	Indicators	Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Customer Loyalty	CL1	0.851	0.928	0.944	0.738
	CL2	0.884			
	CL3	0.893			
	CL4	0.892			
	CL5	0.869			
	CL6	0.760			
ECSR	ECSR1	0.741	0.865	0.903	0.651
	ECSR2	0.862			
	ECSR3	0.848			
	ECSR4	0.813			
	ECSR5	0.762			
RQC	RQC1	0.879	0.921	0.940	0.760
	RQC2	0.897			
	RQC3	0.851			
	RQC4	0.846			
	RQC5	0.884			
RQT	RQT1	0.913	0.928	0.945	0.776
	RQT2	0.881			
	RQT3	0.881			
	RQT4	0.884			
	RQT5	0.843			

Source: Survey data

Table 3 displays the factor loading values, Cronbach´s alpha values, composite reliability values and the AVE values. All have attained the threshold as required by the rule of thumb that Cronbach´s alpha values more than 0.7 (Cronbach, 1951), and composite reliability should be 0.7 or above while AVE should be more than 0.5 (Fornell, & Larcker, 1981). In this study the Cronbach´s alpha values, composite reliability values and the AVE values are more than the acceptable range thus they conform to the threshold. The discriminant validity in terms of the Fornell-Larcker criterion is shown in Table 4 where the rule of thumb says that your diagonal value should be larger than all values in the same row and column. Discriminant validity examined the extent to which constructs intended to measure different concepts are empirically distinct from one another.

Table 4: Discriminant Validity - Fornell Larcker Criterion

	CL	ECSR	RQC	RQT
CL	0.859			
ECSR	0.464	0.807		
RQC	0.470	0.414	0.872	
RQT	0.635	0.425	0.440	0.881

Source: Survey Data

A more modern research alternative to the Fornell–Larker criterion that was used for both types of structural equation models (variance-based and covariance-based) to assess discriminant validity was the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT). The results in Table 5 show that discriminant validity has been attained. We used an HTMT threshold of values below 0.85 following Henseler et al. (2015). Taken altogether, the results support discriminant validity for all constructs.

Table 5: Discriminant Validity Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	CL	ECSR	RQC	RQT
CL				
ECSR	0.513			
RQC	0.508	0.454		
RQT	0.680	0.471	0.474	

Source: Survey data

Structural Model Assessment

The structural model was assessed after the measurement model assessment. Both direct and indirect effects were examined.

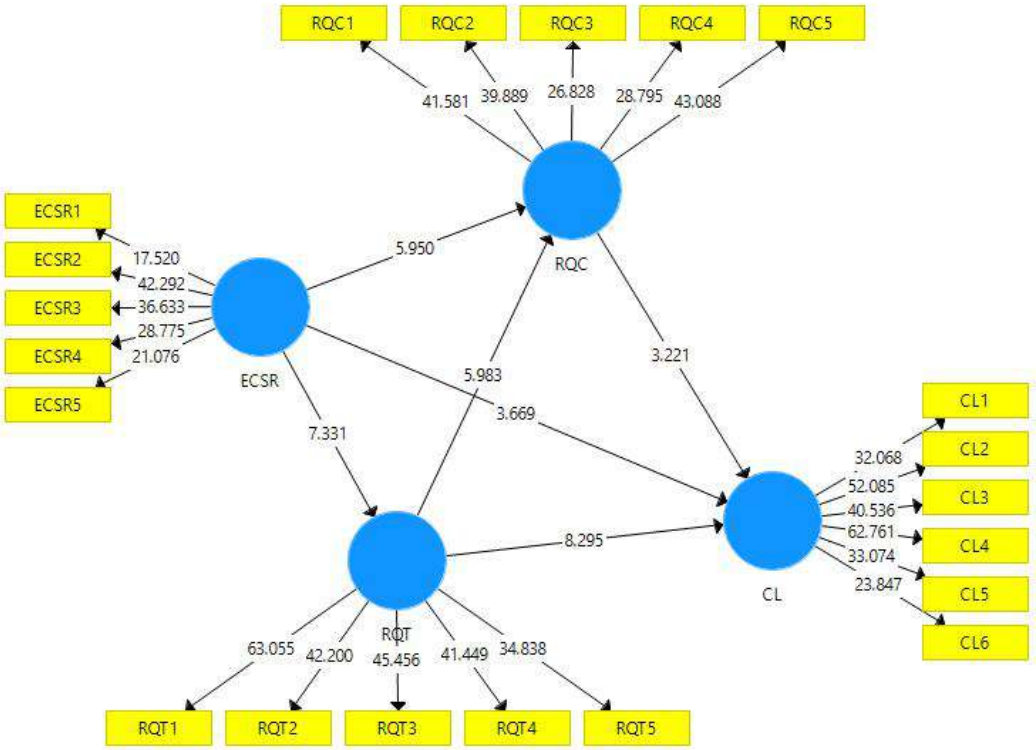


Figure 3. Structural Model Assessment (Direct Effect).

Confirmation of hypotheses was done by bearing in mind the path coefficient, "t" value, and "p" values. Further analysis examined R-Squared (R^2), Effect size (f^2), and the predictive relevance (Q^2). The study has six (06) direct hypotheses as shown in Table 6 and in Figure 1. It (Figure 1) contains the hypotheses testing for direct and indirect relationships. It shows path coefficient and t-value to accept or reject the hypotheses. All the direct hypotheses (H1, H2, H3, H4, H5, H6) were accepted as their t-values were greater than 1.96

Table 6: Structural Model Assessment (Direct Effect Results and Decision)

Hypotheses	Relationship	Beta	STDEV	t Values	p Values	95% CIBC	Decision
H1	ECSR -> CL	0.186	0.051	3.669	0.000	(0.087, 0.276)	Accepted
H2	ECSR -> RQC	0.274	0.046	5.950	0.000	(0.175, 0.357)	Accepted
H3	ECSR -> RQT	0.425	0.058	7.331	0.000	(0.290, 0.534)	Accepted
H4	RQC -> CL	0.183	0.057	3.221	0.001	(0.083, 0.307)	Accepted
H5	RQT -> CL	0.475	0.057	8.295	0.000	(0.361, 0.583)	Accepted
H6	RQT -> RQC	0.325	0.054	5.983	0.000	(0.227, 0.422)	Accepted

Source: Survey Data

Further results of mediation after the bootstrapping process in SmartPLS and following the mediation analysis interpretation process by Zhao et al. (2010), complementary mediation was achieved as shown in Table 7. The t-values are more than 1.96, and p-values are significant; hence, RQC and RQT mediate the relationship between ECSR and CL. All mediators are complementary since the indirect effect was significant, the direct effect was significant, and the total effect was positive (Zhao et al., 2010)

Table 7: Structural Model Assessment Results and Decision (Indirect Effect)

Hypotheses	Relationship	Beta	STDEV	t Value	p Value	95% CIBC	Decision
H7	ECSR -> RQC -> CL	0.050	0.018	2.780	0.006	(0.023, 0.095)	Mediation
H8	ECSR -> RQT -> CL	0.202	0.039	5.188	0.000	(0.132, 0.281)	Mediation

Source: Survey Data

Table 8 displays that the R^2 value is 0.469 This indicates that the dependent variable (Customer Loyalty) is being influenced by 46.9% change when all the constructs are put together.

Table 8: R-Square (R^2) Value

Latent Variable	Variance Explained (R^2)
Customer Loyalty	0.469

Source: Survey data

Moreover, the effect size (f^2) which assesses how strongly one exogeneous construct contributes to explaining a certain endogenous construct in terms of R^2 is shown in Table 9. Cohen (1988) describes f squared values of greater or equal to 0.02 as has having small or weak effect, of greater or equal to 0.15 as having medium or moderate effect, and those having greater or equal to 0.35 as having large or strong effect.

Table 9: Effect Size (f Square)

	f-Squared	Effect Size (f^2)
ECSR	0.050	Small
RQC	0.048	Small
RQT	0.315	Large

Source: Survey data

Predictive relevance (Q^2) is shown in Table 10. According to Geisser (1974) and Stone (1974), Q^2 should be more than 0; where greater than zero but less than 0.25 is small, while greater or equal to 0.25 is medium, and greater or equal to 0.5 is large. The study attained the required Q^2, and it indicates that the PLS path model has the predictive relevance to the endogenous constructs.

Table 10: Construct Cross-validated Redundancy

	SSO	SSE	Q^2 (=1-SSE/SSO) Size	Q^2
CL	1830.000	1205.800	0.341 Medium	
RQC	1525.000	1236.462	0.189 Small	
RQT	1525.000	1316.700	0.137 Small	

Source: Survey data

Discussion

The structural model results demonstrated that all six direct relationships were positive and statistically significant. Notably, environmental corporate social responsibility (ECSR) had a significant impact on customer loyalty (CL), relationship quality commitment (RQC), and relationship quality trust (RQT).

Consequently, hypotheses H1, H2, and H3 are validated. These findings suggest that when customers perceive a firm as environmentally responsible, they are more inclined to remain loyal, trust the firm, and commit to sustaining a long-term relationship with it.

The significant ECSR–CL relationship aligns with the findings of Moisescu and Gică (2020), who reported that perceived corporate environmental responsibility enhanced customer loyalty through customer–company identification and satisfaction. Their study further indicated that environmental responsibility had a greater influence on Generation Y compared to Generation X, implying that its effect may differ across customer segments. Similarly, Jiddi (2023) found that CSR practices improved hotel guests' attitudinal and behavioural loyalty through customer–company identification and trust. Thus, the current findings confirm that customers may reward environmentally responsible firms through repeat purchases, positive recommendations, and resistance to competitors.

Nonetheless, there is evidence that contradicts this. According to Martínez García de Leaniz et al. (2019), environmental CSR does not have a direct impact on behavioural intentions towards hotels with environmental certifications; instead, its influence is mediated by customer trust. The current study's identification of a direct link between ECSR and CL differs from previous findings. This variation could be due to factors such as ECSR awareness, and cultural contexts.

The significant effects of ECSR on RQC and RQT demonstrate that ECSR serves as a tool for improving relationships. The link between ECSR and RQC implies that tourists are more committed when they see a match between their environmental values and those of the business. On the contrary, the ECSR to RQT relationship shows that ECSR initiatives reflect the organisation's integrity and focus on the future. This view is consistent with Kim and Kim (2016), who revealed that CSR positively influences customer trust in the hotel industry, thereby boosting loyalty.

The findings show that RQC had a significant influence on CL, and RQT had a significant effect on both CL and RQC as well. Therefore, hypotheses H4, H5, and H6 were all supported and confirmed. In addition, the effect of RQC on CL shows that customers who value the relationships with a company are more likely to be loyal. In a similar manner, the association between RQT and CL revealed that trust reduces customers' perceived risks and creates customer relationships. This is supported by various studies, including Kim and Kim (2016) who revealed that trust may substantially drive customer loyalty.

The significant effect of RQT on RQC indicates that trust serves as the key variable in driving RQC. This implies that customers are more likely to be loyal when they first believe on the company. This is consistent with Xu (2022), who found that trust drives commitment among customers of high-end hotels and ultimately builds loyalty.

The study found that hypothesis H7 was supported whereby RQC was revealed to have the specific indirect effect on the relationship between ECSR and CL. This further suggests that ECSR, besides having a direct effect, also has an indirect influence on customer loyalty by RQC mediation. Furthermore, this finding indicates that customers are more inclined to be committed to a company when they are environmentally responsible.

The indirect influence of ECSR on CL via RQT was found to be statistically significant, thereby confirming H8. This outcome is consistent with the research of Jiddi (2023) and Martínez García de Leaniz et al. (2019), who highlighted trust as a key variable connecting ECSR with customer loyalty and behavioral intentions. In contrast, Jaaron et al. (2024) observed that GT mediated the impact of internal CSR on green customer behavior but did not mediate the effect of external CSR. This opposing result implies that the mediation by trust might vary based on the type, importance, and visibility of CSR practices.

Further, findings concerning effect size in this study offer a meaningful insight that assists in understanding more on the antecedents of loyalty. The RQT showed a large effect, while the ECSR and RQC demonstrated small effects. Besides ECSR and RQC being significant, their small effect sizes indicate their contribution to explaining the relevant endogenous constructs was limited.

Conclusion and Implications

This study concludes that environmental corporate social responsibility (ECSR) is an important antecedent of relationship quality and customer loyalty. All eight hypotheses were supported: ECSR was positively associated with customer loyalty, relationship quality trust, and relationship quality commitment. Relationship quality trust and commitment were positively associated with loyalty; trust strengthened commitment; and both relational constructs mediated the ECSR–loyalty relationship. These findings extend the ECSR literature by demonstrating that environmental responsibility contributes to loyalty not only directly but also indirectly through distinct yet interconnected relational mechanisms. In particular, the large effect size associated with trust, compared with the small effects of ECSR and commitment, identifies trust as the model's most substantively important mechanism for developing customer commitment. Managerially, SMTOs should position ECSR as an environmental and customer-relationship strategy through visible practices, including waste reduction and biodiversity protection.

Limitations and Areas for Future Research

This study was limited to the tourism sector and investigated the effect of an environment-oriented CSR as perceived by tourists in SMTOs. Further, only the environment-oriented CSR was employed to envistigate the influence of customer loyalty. Demographically the study was characterised with majority of the respondents being Tanzanians 239 (78.4%), while non-Tanzanians constituted only 66 (21.6%) of the total respondents.

Future research should replicate the model across sectors, countries and cultural contexts to assess the generalisability and boundary conditions of relationships among ECSR, trust, commitment, and customer loyalty. Longitudinal designs would be valuable for establishing temporal precedence and evidence on relationship direction, as cross-sectional designs offer limited support for causal inferences. Potential moderators, including ECSR awareness, age, relationship duration, and cultural orientation, should be examined to establish when and for whom ECSR produces stronger relational outcomes. Given the small effect sizes associated with ECSR and commitment, future models should incorporate additional mediators, such as customer satisfaction and perceived value. Studies may also be done to investigate by simultaneously including other CSR-oriented activity variables, for instance, work-oriented CSR, community-oriented CSR, and market-oriented CSR.

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Appendix 1: The measurement items

Variable	Definition	Indicator items	Source
Environmental based CSR (ECSR)	This is about policies, operational management, and reporting in relation to the environmental impact of all activities of the business.	ECSR1. This company respects and protect the natural environment ECSR2. This company makes efficient use of its resources to avoid environmental degradation. ECSR3. This company has the necessary equipment to reduce its negative environmental impact of waste and pollution. ECSR4. This company makes well-planned investments in informing business partners, customers and society on environmental issues ECSR5. This company tries to sponsor activities that favor the environment	Rashid et al (2015); Chang (2015); Turyakira et al. (2012).
Relationship Quality Commitment (RQC)	Commitment refers to a customer's persistent desire to sustain a relationship deemed valuable.	RQC1. I feel emotionally attached to this company RQC2. I feel a strong sense of identification with this company RQC3. This company has a great deal of personal relationship RQC4. Company has personal meaning RQC5. I feel to have an important relationship with this company	Taecharungroj (2013); Morgan and Hunt (1994); Hirji and Kara (2024) ; Tegambwage and Kasoga (2024)
Relationship Quality Trust (RQT)	Customer trust is a tourist's willingness to rely on a tour operator, based on expectations that the operator is capable, reliable, and acts with integrity and goodwill.	RQT1. The company puts the customer's interest first RQT2. The company usually keeps the promise that it makes to me RQT3. This company can be relied upon to keep its promises RQT4. I trust the company to be sincere in dealing with consumers. RQT5. I think the company provides reliable information to its consumers.	Anderson (2025); Aydın (2026); Jie et al. (2024)
Customer Loyalty (CL)	Customer Loyalty is defined as "a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future, reflected through cognitive preference, affective attachment, repurchase intention, actual repeat behaviour, and positive word-of-mouth advocacy".	CL1. I recommend this company to other people CL2. I say positive things about this company and its products CL3. I consider this company my choice for all my needs CL4. I will continue to do business with this company for the next few years. CL5. I am willing to maintain my relationship with this company CL6. I often think of giving donations to this company	Taecharungroj (2013); Oliver (1999) Tegambwage and Kasoga (2024).