

# The Effect of Green Marketing on Corporate Reputation and Purchase Intentions Considering Product Image and Social Responsibility as Mediator from the Perspective of Customers of Retail Stores

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## Abstract:

The aim of this study is to determine whether green marketing with product image as mediator can have any effect on customers' purchase intentions or not. The present study is a descriptive survey and is classified as applied research. Data collection was done through Questionnaire of Ku, Huang and Kim (2013). Statistical population of the study consisted of customers of 9 branches of 'Koroush chain stores' in Tehran, and the data was collected by cluster random sampling. Structural equation method and PLS were utilized for data analysis. The results showed that green marketing directly and significantly impact product image and social responsibility. Also, Green marketing, with product image in connection with social responsibility as mediator, also indirectly has effect on corporate reputation which is followed by purchase intentions from customers' perspective.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, with growing environmental concerns regarding use of natural resources, green marketing has become a new trend. Thus, customers have more responsibilities when it comes to the environment (Ko, E., Hwang, Y. K., & Kim, E. Y. 2013). Moreover, such trend has prompted more responsible consumption, energy saving, purchase of environmentally friendly products and recycling ().

On the other hand, with growing oversight on global businesses (e.g. NGOs and investment companies) and business criteria, companies are obligated to observe such regulations and maintain their social responsibilities (). Considering the growing popularity of such trend among customers, green marketing is an obligation in today's world; with that being said, customers' understanding of green marketing is a critical factor in maintaining product

image which must be taken into account in addition to traditional marketing methods ().

Social responsibility of company was developed based on the fact that there are more responsibilities than just legal obligations. Social responsibility of company means it must be able to contribute to improvement of social welfare directly or indirectly ().

As Jamali (10, 2008) defines it, social responsibility of company is the commitment of company in maintaining sustainable development, benefits of stakeholders and improvement of society.

Auwlodly Jon (2013) defines social responsibility of company as what goes beyond the definition of company's benefits. Generally, social responsibility of company refers to the range of methods used to align the values and behaviors of company with the values and behaviors of its stakeholders (Chatergy& et al., 2009).

In today's competitive world, creating trust and considering purchase intentions of customers both play critical role in persistence of organizations. For the same reason, organizations are increasingly working on social responsibilities in order to create trust among their customers.

With growing awareness about the environment, customers tend to buy more sustainable products with minimum harm to the environment. This procedure is called green shopping.

On the other hand, social responsibility is the commitment of management which takes into account both maintaining the profit of organization and social welfare (saeedi&Haghdadi, 1395). Importance of considering social responsibility has become so highlighted that counts as factors of determining top firms.

Social responsibilities of organizations include: commitment in responding to logical and suitable necessities of stakeholders both inside and outside the firm including; staff, customers, consumers, producers, distributors, media, Environmental Protection Agencies, scientific assemblies, government and other organizations (Keramat&Esmaelpour, 1395).

Nowadays, with advent of various retail stores, competition has become so intense that winning and maintaining customers has turned to the biggest challenge of stores.

With that in effect, collecting enough data regarding customers' cognitive and emotional reactions in order to persuade them to buy products seems necessary. That is because the image customers develop of the store affects their shopping decision.

Product image is an overall impression which relates directly or indirectly to features stored in customers' mind. Product image is a distinguishing factor in competition and is the most important element of maintaining market share (Soo& el al., 2010). The idea of product image is a popular subject among researchers and experts in the field of marketing management.

Product image is the result of knowledge, beliefs, ideas, emotions and impressions about the organization (Forman, 2010. Von & Schell, 2007). Product image is a mixture of certain elements which reflects and reinforces connections in recognition of organization (Cardamenglo&Melior, 2006. Mon, 2007).

Since customers understand all commercial factors, product image is often used instead of corporate credit and corporate recognition (Kong & Yong, 2010).

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

ShirafkaneGhaziani and Nasimi (1397), studied the effect of green marketing on customers' purchase intentions with social responsibility and product image as mediator.

The results showed that green marketing has positive and significant effect on social responsibilities of company and product image. Social responsibility of company has positive and significant effect on customers' purchase intentions. product image has positive and significant effect on customers' purchase intentions.

Finally, green marketing has positive and significant effect on customers' purchase intentions while social responsibility and product image are mediating the correlation between green marketing and customers' purchase intentions.

Rahimi& et al. (1397), studied the effect of advertising the social responsibilities of companies on customers' tendency to buy the products and the results showed advertising the social responsibilities has effect on customers' tendency to buy the products. Also, both sides of social responsibilities (economic and social) have effect on customers' tendency to buy the products.

Jafarinia& et al. (1397), studied the effect of green marketing on customers' purchase intentions with social responsibilities as mediator (case study: the customers of Khorramabad'sPegah dairy product company).

The results showed that green marketing has positive and significant effect on company's social responsibility and purchase intentions, and

company's social responsibility has effect on customer purchase intentions. Social responsibility was also confirmed as mediator.

RafatPanahbaygani (1394), studied green marketing and the effect on purpose of green shopping and behavior of green consumers. The findings of various researches on different societies proved the existence of diversity in behaviors of different customers.

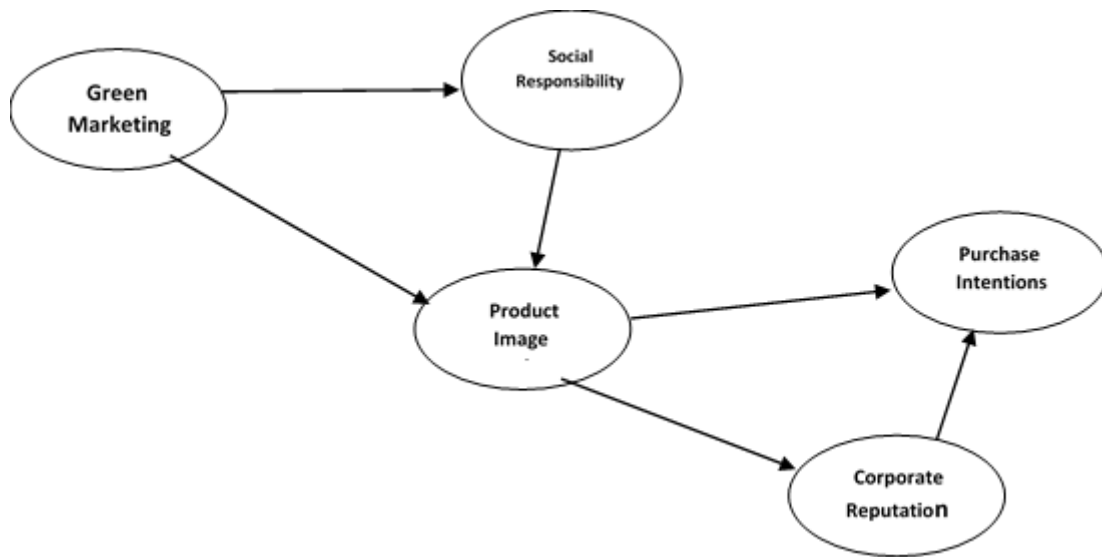
The findings showed that in some societies, customers would notice environmental issues, convince others and buy green products and services in order to preserve the environment, while in another society; customers would make no effort to adjust to the measures which could preserve environment considering environmental issues and green products.

Ko& Hwang (2016), in a research called the functions of green marketing in establishing product image in retail stores, showed that product image consists of three factors: social responsibility, product image, company's reputation. In an estimated model, green marketing had direct effect on social responsibility and product image.

In particular, social responsibility plays a critical role as mediator in correlation of green marketing and product reputation. Product image, product image and product reputation have direct effect on purchase intentions, while social responsibility has indirect effect on purchase intentions in retail stores.

This study analyzes management concepts for evaluation of strategic marketing performance through establishing product image by green marketing.

### Conceptual Model



**Picture 1.** Conceptual Model Based on Ko, E., Hwang, Y. K., & Kim, E. Y. (2013).

### Research hypotheses

Row	Hypothesis
H1	Green marketing has impact on product image through social responsibility
H2	Green marketing has impact on purchase intentions through product image
H3	Green marketing has impact on corporate reputation through product image
H4	Green marketing has impact on social responsibility
H5	Green marketing has impact on product image
H6	Social responsibility has impact on product image
H7	product image has impact on purchase intentions
H8	product image has impact on corporate reputation
H9	Corporate reputation has impact on purchase intentions

### III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### Green marketing

Energy crisis in mid 1970s prompted the first wave of researches regarding environmental issues in early 1980s. However, it was not until after 1990 that

scientist unanimously warned about the dire consequences of the effect of human economic activities on the ecological balance of the earth. In fact 1990s was named the decade of environment. That was while social and environmental concerns emerged as a priority in the view of customers and

producers. Green marketing roots in waves of concerns in 1970s when the concept of ecological marketing was developed. Such changes concerned those with most environmental impact and developing technologies helped to reduce the negative impact. The reaction of academic people in the field of marketing regarding environmental issues in late 1980s and early 1990s was out of naturalism. Yet, there are significant differences between environmental activities of 1970s and today's green movement.

Nowadays, green marketing is usually referred to as a general concept. It was first introduced in Europe in 1980 when especial products were believed to be harmful to earth's atmosphere. Terms such as Phosphate release, recyclability, changeability, ozone friendly activities and environmental friendly are normally recognized by the customers of green marketing. Such terms are a request for green marketing; Green marketing is a wide concept that can be used in consumer products, industrial products and even services. Thus, green marketing can cover a wide range of activities including; product modification, production process modification, packaging modification and advertisement modification. Even though environmental issues impact all human activities, marketing is a field that receives the most heated discussions and news. Terms such as green marketing and environmental marketing are regularly heard in the news. Many governments are concerned with activities of green marketing and try to organize them. For example, in USA, federal trade commission and National Bar Association published documents that reviewed issues about green marketing; that is while one of the problems regarding green marketing is the small proportion of actions (Poudineh& et al. 1396).

## Product Image

Brand image is a simple perception phenomenon which is influenced by company's activities. Professor Kevin Keller, prominent scientist and theorist of brand management, defines brand image as consumer's perception of the brand which is reflected from the review of image in memory. Brand image is a collection of perceptions which are present in costumer's mind. In other words, customer's perception of the particular features of one product reflects his whole conception about the brand of that company. Customer in fact develops an image based on all factors of one trademark including; name, logo, products, and advertisements and messages (Heidari, 1396).

Brand image is consumer's perception of the brand present in his mind. In other words, it is customer's perception of the particular features of one product (Fazli. Enzari, 1394). Brand image is a simple perception phenomenon which is influenced by company's activities. Keller defines brand image as consumer's perception of the brand which is reflected from the review of image in memory. Brand image is customer's perception of the quality which is intertwined with company's brand. Customer's image of a brand is based on all factors of one trademark. Customer in fact develops an image based on all factors of one trademark including; name, logo, products, advertisements and messages and announcements. Isak proved the effect of positive brand image on customer loyalty. Kerto& Broody also presented a model for customer loyalty in 2010 and defined brand image as one of the effective variables. Many other researches have also proved the same results. Moreover, it has been showed that positive brand image reduces risks of customer's misconception and raises customer loyalty and satisfaction (Aslanloo&khoddami, 1394).



## **Purchase Intentions**

Consumer makes decisions according to certain reasons and motives. There are 6 major motives including: 1- for the benefit 2- fear of loss 3- certainty and peace 4- security and protection 5- pride of ownership 6- emotions satisfaction. There is no clear order for these motives neither is any specific priority. A person's shopping stems from emotions not logic as they are either doing it for profit or fear of loss and they would like to have peace, security and protection and pride in ownership of their belongings. Thus, people do their shopping based on emotions and try to justify it with logic.

With competitive and dynamic economy, organizations have undergone major overhauls. In today's competitive market, stores are losing their customers, yet this does not mean that customers' demand is diminishing whatsoever, but it shows that customers do their shopping elsewhere. While in the past the main strategy of stores was attracting more customers, today, producers and stores put more focus on maintaining their customers. Since it is impossible for every business to carry on without customers, customers' repurchase has become more important for managers and Customer Relationship Management has been introduced for the same reason.

Customers' purchase intention is one of the most important factors in orienting customers toward the same products and service. Purchase intention is the perception of the image developed in people's mind. Customers have certain expectations and when they are met, product or service will be valued better. If it is determined that customer's perceived value of the product has effect on purchase intentions, there will be chance for planning to increase or decrease the value of customer's perception and work accordingly to enhance product sustainability in volatile markets.

Meanwhile, information sharing among customers must not be taken for granted as it has always existed as a conspicuous yet important factor (Rahnama&Radmehr, 1396).

Customer shopping behavior refers to the process of individual search for choice, purchase, utilizing the product and service considering satisfaction. According to the theory of logical reasoning, theory of planned behavior and model of attitudes, customer's motives can effectively help to predict real behaviors.

## **Corporate Social Responsibility**

The concept of Social responsibility was first introduced in middle of 20 century in USA and attracted much attention in global economic, scientific and political settings. The presence of corporate social responsibility in recent years, roots in factors such as global transactions, more complex business setting, necessity of transparency and it has been a response to the challenges of globalization. The first models of corporate social responsibility emerged in 1960s which associated social aspects of social responsibilities directly with higher responsibilities and beyond economic and legal responsibilities (Rashidzadeh, 1393).

Nowadays, considering the ever increasing scope of businesses, the effect they pose to social system and structure rise too. In fact, businesses inside a social system act as a mini social system. This has become important for there are several international businesses which have stronger impact on global economy than majority of developing countries (Renborg& et al. 2017). Social responsibility associates with activities that capital owners and businesses voluntarily perform in a society as effective and helpful members. Social responsibility is a type of strategic management which motivates

organizations to draw long-term plans in order to change the society they are a member of. It must be mentioned in the definition of business that there are different elements used by people and groups to produce goods or perform services. These people and groups are called business or economic unit. Generally, the concept of corporate social responsibility has become the dominant paradigm in management of companies which is the result of the development of non-governmental organizations, protest movements against corporate power, increased social awareness, and development of capital markets, expansion of public corporations and financial and ethical scandals of big companies (Brammer, 1390). Social responsibilities are a set of responsibilities and commitments that organizations must have to preserve and protect the society they are a member of (Gholipour, 1390).

Corporate Social responsibility is the responsibility of an organization in response to the consequences of activities that impact society. Society means all the stakeholders of the company. The most important stakeholders who are directly or indirectly involved in the company's affairs include: consumers, staff, owners or shareholders and society. This concept must become an organizational culture which does not depend on one person, so all the members would know that the same trend must continue under all circumstances. In other words, corporate social responsibility is an organizational belief which pursues a common value among all the stakeholders, and it would not have start or end points like a project (Mojtahedzadeh&Tebghian, 1394).

### **Corporate Reputation**

Corporate reputation is the reflection of the perception of key stakeholders regarding the activities of organization and it reviews the status of products or services. A good corporate reputation

would save stakeholders from wrong information. A company with good reputation would rarely be affected by market negative reactions or disappointing income, and it seldom derails after downsizing. Besides, good reputation attracts staff and customers (Lai &Chinu, 2010). There is a positive correlation between performance and reputation of a company. If corporate reputation increases market share, and increased market share increases the value of the company. Corporate reputation is also derived from history of company's financial and social performance (Vahabi, 1391). Corporate reputation has attracted the attention of many marketing researchers. Aowing and et al. say that companies today, regardless of their place, have understood the importance of corporate reputation. Current studies regarding corporate reputation revolves around the Structural definition of fame; in other words, it refers to a practical procedure with tangible outcomes. Corporate reputation goes beyond perception and product image. Managers use corporate reputation as intangible asset to create competitive advantage. Companies with better reputation rarely face insufficient profit. Also, staff and customers are attracted by such reputation. Reduction of operating costs, good customer return rate, increased sale and possibility of price increase come in wake of good reputation. Even though there are numerous studies such as Ingles & et al. regarding the positive correlation of corporate reputation and performance, there is still room for more research on the consequences of corporate reputation (Keh&Xie, 2009).

### **IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The present study is a descriptive survey and is classified as applied research. Data collection was done through Questionnaire of Ku, Huang and Kim (2013). Statistical population of the study consisted

of customers of 9 branches of 'Koroush chain stores' in Tehran, and the data was collected by cluster random sampling. Structural equation method and PLS were utilized for data analysis.

## V. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research Data were analyzed by PLS as this method is suitable for predictive models in making the right theory, and performing reflective measurement models and single indicator structures would be easier (Gefen et al., 2000; Hair et al., 2013). The first step in model analysis is measurement (Hair et al., 2013). T value was reported significant for all factor loadings. Factor loadings were also reported to be above 70% for most research questions. Model fit

and factor loading coefficients were analyzed by Cronbach's alpha coefficients and composite reliability coefficients. The second criterion for Assessment of the Measurement Model Fit is Convergent validity which deals with assessment of correlation between each structure and questions. Ideal factor load must be bigger than 0.7, and if the factor load goes below 0.4, the relevant factor must be omitted. Factor loads must stay significant in 0.95 and AVE must be more than 0.5, and amounts more than 0.4 can be overlooked. As can be seen, average extracted variance (AVE) for all variables stands above 50%. For Combined reliability (CR) and RHO\_A, 0.7 and 0.6 were set for threshold values.

**Table 1.** Evaluation of the Measurement Model

Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Composite Reliability	rho_A	Cronbach's Alpha	Variables
0.702	0.876	0.878	0.875	green marketing
0.613	0.826	0.826	0.826	Social responsibility
0.632	0.873	0.873	0.873	Product image
0.535	0.851	0.854	0.850	Corporate reputation
0.673	0.861	0.862	0.860	Purchase intentions

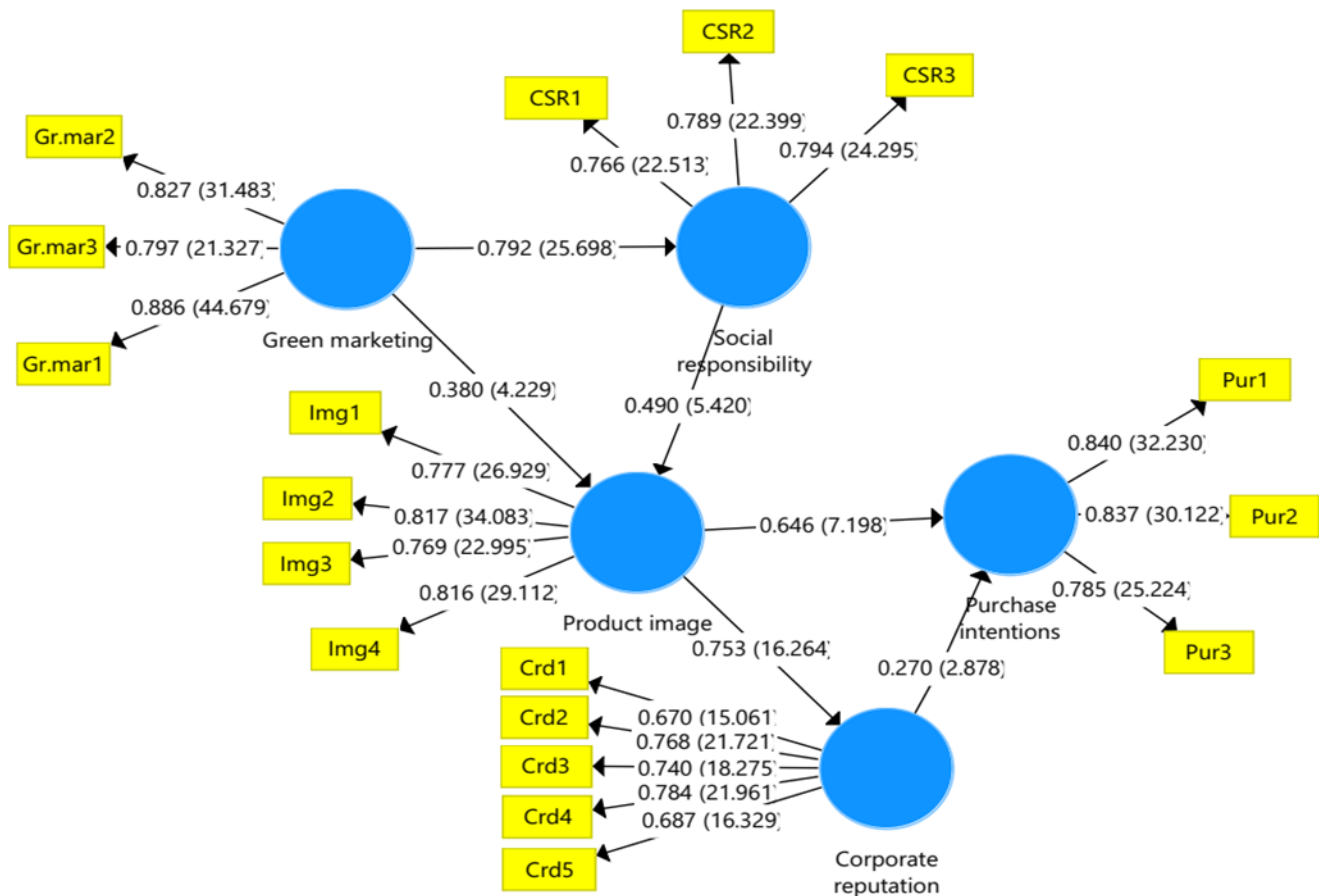
PLS-SEM is utilized for its predictive superiority, also almost all model estimations use Coefficient of determination R<sup>2</sup> for determining model ability in explaining and predicting latent (endogenous) values (Ringle & Straub, 2012). PLS algorithm calculates estimated coefficients of determination for every exogenous variable and the path coefficients for every hypothesis in the model. 0.19, 0.33 and 0.67 were chosen respectively for poor, average and strong

R<sup>2</sup>. For example, in picture 2, R<sup>2</sup> for dependent variables has been calculated 0.679 for product image, 0.627 for social responsibility, 0.679 for corporate reputation and 0.753 for purchase intentions; considering the set values for R<sup>2</sup>, fitting structural model is confirmed appropriate. Figure 1 depicts path coefficients and factor loading of variables where all factor loadings are above average 0.5. The bigger factor loading is and the closer it is to



1, the better exogenous variable can determine the endogenous variable. If factor loading is below 0.5, correlation is considered poor. Moreover, path coefficients show correlations intensity among variables so that all correlations are significant. For

example, path coefficient for the effect of green marketing on social responsibility equals 0.792 and is significant. That is because t-value for all correlations is above 1.96.



**Figure 1.**Results of Structural Equation Modeling for Conceptual Model

Blindfolded order in smart PLS showed that Q2 for dependent variables of research (product image) is 0.367, 0.321 for social responsibility, 0.247 for corporate reputation and 0.437 for purchase

intentions, and all in all the model predictive power is fair (Hair et al. 2011, Ringle & Straub 2012). Data analysis also confirms all hypotheses (table 2).

**Table 2.**Support of Hypotheses

	Standard estimation	T-value	Results
Green marketing -> Product image -> Corporate reputation	0.286	4.156	Supported

Green marketing -> Social responsibility -> Product image	0.388	5.049	Supported
Green marketing -> Product image -> Purchase intentions	0.245	3.604	Supported
Green marketing -> Social responsibility	0.792	25.698	Supported
Green marketing -> Product image	0.380	4.229	Supported
Social responsibility -> Product image	0.490	5.420	Supported
Product image -> Purchase intentions	0.646	7.198	Supported
Product image -> Corporate reputation	0.753	16.264	Supported
Corporate reputation -> Purchase intentions	0.270	2.878	Supported

## VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Green concept is a new expression in organizations' management. Nowadays, organizations and managers are expected to move toward establishment of green organizations as part of their social responsibility. Green organizations perform all their responsibilities, goals and missions in a way not to harm any person, other organizations and the needs of next generations. One of the most important competitive advantages of new century is the production and distribution of environmental friendly products (green products); In addition to the increasing concerns and environmental threats, there are various challenges for different countries and cultures. Since studies regarding the impact of green marketing on purchase intentions can help organizations to find better Positioning strategies for their products and win remarkable reputation, this study attempted to analyze the effect of green marketing on purchase intentions considering product image as mediator.

In a competitive environment, social responsibility is considered to be one important part of strategic measures of trade. Therefore, such studies can change the view of marketers about marketing strategies and

assess organization's marketing performance with concentrating on product image. Moreover, it was showed that green marketing programs can have great effect on product image and impact purchase intentions by the same mean. Green marketing plays an important role in establishing social responsibility and product image shows the effectiveness of such measures. In green marketing, corporate identity consists of 3 factors: social responsibility, product image and corporate reputation.

The findings showed that green marketing not also does positively impact customers' perception of company's social responsibility, but completely improves customers' perception of the store.

It was also showed that when customers perceive company's social responsibilities positively, product image is also perceived better. The importance of improving product image is that it can help boost corporate reputation and indirectly increase purchase.

It should be noted that green marketing impacts product image through social responsibility indirectly, which means social responsibility works as a mediator. That is while product image acts as mediator in correlation of green marketing and

corporate reputation.

Corporate reputation not only impacts purchase intentions positively and significantly, but also acts as mediator in correlation of product image and purchase intentions, improving purchase intentions.

Green marketing has been defined as company's attempt for design, advertisement, price and distribution of products in an environmentally friendly framework. Green marketing is an important part of modern business, and in addition to income and benefit, concentrates on Ecological balance, reducing environmental pollutions and preservation of natural resources.

There were some limitations in this research such as failing to use other data collection tools (survey and observation) and not considering cultural variables. It is also suggested that company identify its target customers and according to the needs of its customers, use creative strategies in advertisement through brochures and catalogs about products and company's green process to maintain and expand its competitive market share, and managers should design and produce goods with recyclable signs which are in line with customers' green demands.

## VII. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Considering the fact that the findings of this study are limited to Iran, it is suggested that similar studies be conducted in other societies. It is also suggested that other predictive models be utilized for making new models so that the effect of other variables that were not considered here due to limitations, can be taken into account.

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