

EFFECT OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY ON EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN SERVICE SECTOR OF INDIA

¹Priyanka, ² Shabnam Saxena

¹ Research Scholar, ² Professor

¹ Haryana School of Business

¹ Guru Jambheshwar University of Science & Technology, Hisar, India.

Abstract

This study examines the effect of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) on employee engagement in service sector of India, guided by Social Exchange Theory. The research highlights how CSR practices, particularly internal initiatives such as employee well-being and career development, positively influence employee engagement. Based on a survey of 214 employees, the findings show that CSR fosters a sense of pride and belongingness in employees, enhancing their job satisfaction and organizational loyalty. The study provides practical insights for organizations to integrate CSR into their strategies, contributing to employee engagement and organizational success. This study also suggests avenues for future research.

Keywords: Internal Corporate Social Responsibility, External Corporate Social Responsibility, Employee Engagement, Service Sector.

Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has gained significant attention globally and it is at the spotlight (Jiang & Wong, 2016). Trading system started around the world to meet matching needs. As the time passes, businesses witnessed changes in scale and size. There were varied perspectives, motives, and philosophies guiding the core of business houses. When commerce was formally described, the profit motive was the most highlighted aspect of conducting business (Weisbrod, 1998). With the evolution of business processes and methods, people started recognizing the need to give back to society, as business houses are more or less a part of the community (Dumas et al., 2018). The modern-day, widely recognized concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) started with this need to give back to the community. CSR is a comprehensive area posing ethical, social, and environmental implications on business practices (Kolk, 2016). This concept has gained immense attention within the corporate sector as a strategic tool to enhance a company's reputation, build trust among stakeholders, and achieve long-term sustainability (Esen, 2013).

In many regions around the world, it is also legally mandated but CSR in its true senses extends beyond legal compilation, focusing on creating shared value for stakeholders (Buhmann, 2006). Large corporations involve numerous stakeholders, and taking care of all of them effectively is also considered a form of CSR (Baumann-Pauly et al., 2013). CSR is somehow linked in behaving in a socially responsible manner towards all stakeholders and acting sustainably, academically defined as voluntary initiatives undertaken by organizations to contribute to societal welfare beyond legal and economic obligations (Wirba, 2024). It encompasses activities that support environmental sustainability, community development, and employee well-being. In globalized business environment, CSR is no longer an option but a necessity, especially for organizations seeking to remain competitive and build lasting relationships with their stakeholders (Vilanova et al., 2009).

Among all the stakeholders in a business organization, employees are among the most important (De Bussy & Suprawan, 2012). In the context of a service sector firm, this aspect holds more truth (Anderson, 2006). This can be explained with the help of an example: a customer goes to the bank for some task like depositing

the money and the employee of that bank greets the customer well and performs the job with dedication and zeal. The customer of that bank will feel great about the whole organization. For service sector firms, it is crucial to train and treat their employees well. Moreover, in recent times, employee well-being has become a significant focus in the corporate world (Guest, 2017). Employees are increasingly seeking purpose and meaning in their work, and companies that fail to recognize this shift will struggle to attract, retain, and engage top talent (Shuck & Rose, 2013).

As far as the stakeholder aspect is concerned, major studies have been conducted from the viewpoint of consumers (Lee & Heo, 2009; Saeidi et al., 2015). Despite this fact, employee-related CSR has not only gained traction as a practice in recent time, but many academicians have also linked it to job satisfaction and employee performance (Akram et al., 2023; Valentine & Fleischman, 2008). According to Ali et al. (2010), failing to understand the impact of CSR on employees' attitudes and behaviours can result in flawed conclusions, ultimately misleading researchers and practitioners about the effectiveness and utility of CSR. In the light of such observations, recent research studies have linked CSR concept to employee performance and employee engagement (Alketbi & Ahmad, 2024). Although numerous scholars have explored the relationship between CSR and various employee-related outcomes, there remains a need to investigate this connection from the perspective of employee engagement, especially for the service sector and that too in developing countries like India. Previous studies have largely overlooked the potential impact of organizational CSR practices on employee engagement (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019).

Employee engagement (EE), a psychological state characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption in work (Schaufeli et al., 2002), is particularly significant for the service sector. EE not only enhances productivity but also fosters a deeper organizational commitment, reducing turnover intentions (Saks, 2006). While the CSR-EE nexus is well explored in developed contexts (e.g., Europe and North America), studies in emerging economies like India remain sparse (Glavas, 2016). The service sector of India is witnessing a paradigm shift with employee well-being and corporate reputation being intertwined with business success. It provides a fertile ground for such exploration.

This study investigates the impact of CSR initiatives on the engagement of service sector employees of India. Grounded in Social Exchange Theory (Homans, 1958), posits that CSR fosters a sense of pride and belonging among employees, enhancing their engagement levels. Engaged employees exhibit higher levels of productivity, job satisfaction, and loyalty, which in turn contribute to improved organizational performance and reduced turnover rates (Nasir Ansari & Irfan, 2023). Employees are likely to feel more motivated and committed when they perceive their organization as socially responsible. CSR activities, especially those focusing on internal aspects such as employee welfare, workplace safety, and career development, directly impact employee engagement levels. The findings are expected to bridge the knowledge gap in emerging economies and offer practical implications for enhancing organizational effectiveness through CSR-driven engagement strategies.

Literature Review

CSR has evolved as a multi-dimensional concept encompassing voluntary organizational practices aimed at societal, environmental, and economic development (Carroll, 1991). It involves a strategic alignment of organizational objectives with stakeholder welfare (Lim & Greenwood, 2017). Carroll's CSR pyramid categorizes CSR into economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities. Economic responsibilities are foundational, requiring businesses to be profitable; legal responsibilities ensure compliance with societal laws; ethical responsibilities pertain to moral obligations, and philanthropic responsibilities emphasize voluntary contributions to societal well-being.

CSR initiatives are broadly classified into internal and external dimensions (Hawn & Ioannou, 2016). Internal CSR activities focus on employee's welfare, including fair wages, workplace safety, career

development opportunities, and work-life balance (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2021). External CSR addresses societal and environmental concerns, such as community development programs, environmental conservation, and ethical supply chain management (Quarshie et al., 2016). Researchers like Hameed et al.(2016) argue that internal CSR is more directly tied to employee perceptions and behaviour, while external CSR enhances the company's public image, indirectly affecting employees' sense of pride and loyalty (Mandina et al., 2014).

In Indian context, CSR gained legal recognition under the Companies Act of 2013, mandating eligible organizations to allocate 2% of their net profit to CSR activities (Dharmapala & Khanna, 2018). This regulation has spurred companies to integrate CSR into their core strategies. However, the effectiveness of these practices in influencing employee attitudes, particularly engagement, remains underexplored. Employee engagement is a dynamic and multi-faceted construct involving the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of employee involvement (Kahn, 1990). Engaged employees are characterized by their vigor, dedication, and absorption at work (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Vigor refers to energy and mental resilience; dedication involves enthusiasm and significance; absorption is the state of being deeply engrossed in work (Gera et al., 2019).

Theoretical frameworks for employee engagement include Kahn's model of psychological conditions—meaningfulness, safety, and availability—which posits that engagement arises when employees find their work meaningful, feel safe to express themselves, and have access to necessary resources. Saks (2006) further differentiates engagement from related constructs like job satisfaction and organizational commitment, emphasizing engagement's focus on individual performance within specific work roles.

Engagement has been linked to numerous positive outcomes, including increased productivity, reduced turnover, enhanced customer satisfaction, and overall organizational success (Andrew & Sofian, 2012; Bailey et al., 2017; Kim & Kim, 2020). Consequently, it is considered a strategic priority for organizations striving to maintain a competitive edge.

The studies suggest that CSR influences employee engagement by shaping employees' perceptions of organizational values and their alignment with personal values (Carlini & Grace, 2021; Raza et al., 2024). Internal CSR, such as fair treatment and opportunities for professional growth, fosters trust and loyalty among employees, directly impacting engagement levels. External CSR, while less immediate, enhances employees' sense of pride in their organization, motivating them to contribute meaningfully to its success. Gunawan and Putra (2014) found that employees who perceive their organizations as socially responsible exhibit higher levels of engagement, particularly in industries where CSR practices are integral to the organizational culture. In the Indian context, Desai et al.(2010) observed significant differences in engagement levels across different industries, with manufacturing sectors showing higher engagement due to their emphasis on employee welfare. Sharma and Tewari (2018) highlighted the role of CSR in engaging employees by aligning organizational goals with societal expectations, particularly in IT and service sectors. Based on the above discussion, we propose the hypothesis that CSR positively effects employee engagement in service sector employees in India.

Research Objective

To study the effect of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) on employee engagement in service sector of India.

Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis Development

Building on social exchange theory (SET), which posits that employees reciprocate their efforts in form of organizational benefits with their positive behaviours, CSR is seen as an organizational investment in

employees and society (Saks, 2006). Employees perceive CSR activities as a sign of organizational commitment to ethical practices and stakeholder welfare, motivating them to reciprocate with higher engagement. Internal CSR is likely to have a stronger reciprocal effect, as employees directly benefit from these initiatives. Moreover, organizational identification theory suggests that CSR practices enhance employees' identification with their organization. When employees perceive their organization as socially responsible, they feel a sense of pride and belonging, which translates into higher engagement. Based on the literature reviewed and the aforementioned theories, the conceptual framework for this study is presented in Figure 1. The conceptual framework proposes that CSR practices significantly influence the employee engagement of service sector employees in North India.

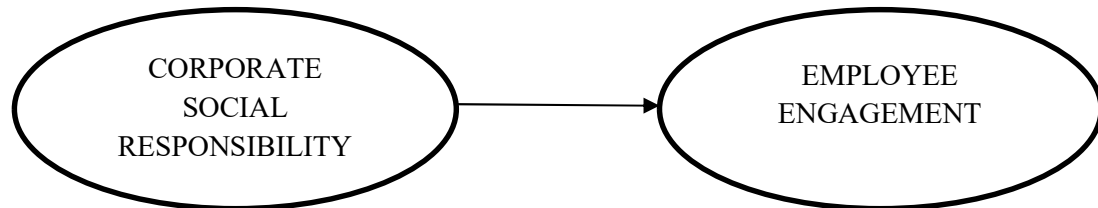


Figure 1 Developed by Author

The conceptual model positions CSR as the independent variable and employee engagement as the dependent variable. It attempts to explain the dynamics between CSR and overall employee engagement. While the relationship between CSR and employee engagement has been examined across various contexts, there remains a notable lack of empirical studies focused on service sector of India. Given that CSR is legally mandated in India, this underscores the importance of deriving context-specific insights. This study empirically test this model on the basis of primary data collected from employees of service sector of India on the basis of the hypothesis that:

H₁: CSR positively effects employee engagement in service sector employees of India.

Research Methodology

Measurement Instrument Development

To test the proposed hypotheses, we developed a questionnaire based on the theoretical framework. The researcher conducted a literature survey to identify existing scales and items that have been used to measure CSR practices and employee engagement in similar contexts. Our questionnaire included items on corporate social responsibility and employee engagement. The questionnaire contained two parts. Part-A included a cover page, which introduced the context of our study to the respondents. The purpose of the study was mentioned and confidentiality was ensured. Furthermore, it included questions relating to the demographic profile and employment related data of the respondents. Part-B contained questions related to the constructs under study. Each item was measured using 5-point Likert scales rated as 1 for strongly agree to 5 for strongly disagree. To measure CSR, the researcher adapted 5 items from Maignan & Ferrell(2000) and Rupp et al.(2018) and employee engagement was measured by adapting 9 items from Soane et al.(2012) scale.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data for this study was collected through a structured survey administered to employees over a period of 12 weeks (May 2024 to July 2024). During the data collection, ethical considerations were adhered to, ensuring confidentiality and voluntary participation. The survey was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, employees provided demographic and employment-related details. In the second phase, information

about their perceptions of the organizations’ CSR practices and their engagement levels was collected. This phased approach ensured data reliability and minimized the impact of common method bias. Surveys were distributed within service companies located in major corporate hubs across North India. In the initial phase, researcher distributed 360 questionnaires to employees of service sector, 228 questionnaire were received. Ultimately, 214 valid responses were used for data analysis after excluding 14 responses deemed invalid due to incomplete information. A total of 214 employees participated in the survey service sector companies actively practicing CSR, as verified through an assessment of their annual reports. Our study employed structural equation modeling to measure the impact of CSR practices on employee engagement. In the following sections, the obtained results and findings from the data analysis are discussed.

Results

Sample Profile

Table 1 highlight the sample profile, revealing that the majority of participants are male (60.3%), and female employees comprise 39.7% of the sample. As per the age distribution of the sample, a notable portion falls within the 20-30 age group (43.9%), followed by the 31-40 age group (30.8%) and the 41-50 age group (25.2%).

Table 1: Sample profile

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Gender	Male	129	60.3
	Female	85	39.7
Age (in years)	20-30	94	43.9
	31-40	66	30.8
	41-50	54	25.2
Education	Graduation	102	47.7
	Post-Graduation	105	49.1
	Others (above Post-graduation)	7	3.3
Work Experience (in years)	Below 5	75	35.1
	6 – 10	73	34.2
	Above 10	66	30.8

Source: Survey data

In terms of educational background, post-graduates constitute the largest segment (49.1%), followed by graduates (47.7%), with a small percentage falling into the category above post-graduation (3.3%), which includes PhD or MPhil degrees rather than professional add-on courses. As far as work experience is concerned, employees with less than 5 years of professional experience constitute the most significant proportion (35.1%), followed by those with 6-10 years of experience (34.2%), and employees with over 10 years of experience making up 30.8% of the sample.

Common Method Biasness

Common method bias is a challenge that emerges due to single rater effects (Podsakoff et al., 2003). To assess this bias, Harman’s one factor test (Harman, 1976) was employed. Following the protocols, all variables were subjected to an unrotated factor analysis to explore their shared variance. The findings revealed that the primary extracted factor accounted for 27.39% of the total variance. As a result, the

presence of common method bias was ruled out, since no individual factor accounted for more than 50% of the variance.

Assessment of Measurement Model

The results of the confirmatory factor analysis revealed significant relationships between the dimensions of CSR practices and their influence on employee engagement in the context of the service sector employees in India. The structural model exhibited a good fit with the data, as indicated by various fit indices. The χ^2/df value was 1.478, the comparative fit index (CFI) was 0.945 suggesting a good fit of model, and the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) was 0.934, Normed fit index (NFI) was 0.885 which is near to .90, goodness of fit index (GFI) was 0.834 and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was 0.044 which suggest that the model is fit and acceptable (Baumgartner & Homburg, 1996). Since, all the values were above the recommended cut-off range, the hypothesised model ensures an adequate fit for further analysis.

Table 2: Summary statistics of model fit

<i>Fit index</i>	<i>Recommended values*</i>	<i>Observed values for measurement model</i>	<i>Observed values for structural model</i>
Chi-square/degrees of freedom	<3	1.478	1.548
CFI	>.95 (good) >.90 (acceptable)	0.945	0.950
TLI	>.95	0.934	0.946
NFI	<.90	0.900*	0.900**
RMSEA	<.05 (good)	0.044	0.051
GFI	<.80 (acceptable)	0.834	0.813

Notes: CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis index; NFI= Normed fit index, RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; * calculated value 0.885 approximated as .900, ** calculated value 0.870 approximated as .900.

*Source: Hu & Bentler(1999)

The validity and reliability of the constructs were examined using Cronbach’s alpha and composite reliability. All the values were above the threshold limit of 0.70 as recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981) (see Table 3). Convergent validity was assured using the factor loadings and the average variance extracted (AVE). Factor loadings were significant (p<0.005) and higher than the recommended limit of 0.50 (Hulland, 1999). AVE values were also above the 0.50 threshold (Hair, 2013) as given in Table 3.

Table 3: Convergent validity and reliability of constructs

<i>Research constructs</i>	<i>Items</i>	<i>Factor loading</i>	<i>AVE</i>	<i>Composite reliability</i>	<i>Cronbach's alpha</i>
CSR	CSR1	.881	0.768	0.959	0.930
	CSR 2	.867			
	CSR 3	.895			
	CSR 4	.894			
	CSR 5	.860			
Employee Engagement	EE 1	.847	0.725	0.929	0.941
	EE2	.850			
	EE3	.862			
	EE4	.861			
	EE5	.836			
	EE 6	.864			
	EE 7	.850			
	EE 8	.867			
	EE 9	.867			

Note: AVE= Average variance extracted

Source(s): Author's own

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was also examined by comparing the square root of AVE to the interconstruct correlation as suggested (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). It was found that the square root of AVE is larger than the interconstruct correlation as demonstrated in Table 4. Thus, it can be concluded that our measurement model ensures reliability and adequate convergent and discriminant validity. At last, a test for multicollinearity was conducted. The VIF scores were below the recommended value of 10, establishing that correlation between variables was not high and multicollinearity was ruled out (Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2006).

Table 4: Discriminant validity of each construct

Constructs	CSR	EE
CSR	<i>0.876</i>	
EE	0.121	<i>0.876</i>

Notes: The diagonal italic numbers between the constructs are the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) for constructs and below it are the correlation coefficients between the two constructs .Discriminant validity between constructs is established when the square root of AVE is greater than the absolute value of the correlation coefficient between the constructs.

Source(s): Author's own

Structural model

The hypothesized relationship between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) practices and employee engagement was tested using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) in AMOS 24.0. The model fit indices indicated a good fit, with $\chi^2/df = 1.548$, RMSEA = 0.051, CFI = 0.95, TLI = 0.94, GFI = 0.813, and NFI = 0.870, all meeting the threshold limits suggested by Hu and Bentler (1999). The results support the

hypothesis, showing that CSR practices positively influence employee engagement ($\beta = 0.299, p < 0.001$). This finding aligns with previous studies that highlight CSR as a key factor in enhancing employees' emotional attachment to their organization and fostering a sense of purpose (Rupp et al., 2013). CSR activities are seen as a means of improving employees' job satisfaction, motivation, and overall engagement by fulfilling their need for social and ethical alignment with their employer. The positive relationship observed in this study supports the idea that when employees perceive their organization as socially responsible, they are more likely to engage in productive behaviours and contribute positively to the organizational goals.

Discussion

The study confirms the positive influence of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) on employee engagement within the Indian service sector, aligning with Social Exchange Theory. It highlights that CSR practices enhance employees' sense of pride, organizational trust, and engagement levels. These findings support the argument that socially responsible organizations not only foster better workplace environments but also gain committed employees who drive productivity and innovation.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study provide several actionable insights for organizations in the service sector. Firstly, integrating Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) into core business strategies can significantly enhance employee engagement, which is crucial for reducing turnover rates and fostering organizational commitment. Employee-centric CSR initiatives, such as career development programs, workplace safety measures, and well-being activities, have a direct and measurable impact on engagement levels. These initiatives not only benefit employees but also contribute to creating a positive organizational culture. Furthermore, CSR practices improve brand reputation, attracting talent and customers who value ethical and socially responsible organizations. From a policy perspective, the study suggests that regulatory bodies could mandate greater transparency in CSR reporting to ensure meaningful and sustainable contributions. This would encourage organizations to adopt practices that not only fulfil legal requirements but also promote societal and employee well-being.

Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of CSR and its influence on employee engagement, particularly in the under-researched context of emerging economies like India. By examining this relationship within the service sector, the study enriches the literature with context-specific insights that highlight the unique dynamics at play in developing markets. It validates the relevance of Social Exchange Theory, demonstrating how CSR practices act as organizational investments that elicit positive reciprocal behaviours from employees. Additionally, the research emphasizes the importance of internal CSR practices, suggesting that their direct impact on employees is more significant than external CSR in fostering engagement. The findings also underline the need for sector-specific studies, as they reveal distinctive CSR implications for the service industry compared to other sectors.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

While this study offers valuable insights, certain limitations should be noted. The geographical scope is restricted to North India, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions. Expanding the study to include a pan-India sample could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the CSR-employee engagement relationship. Additionally, the study focuses solely on the service sector, and a comparative analysis with other sectors, such as manufacturing, could yield richer insights into the sectoral nuances of CSR's impact. The cross-sectional design of the study also restricts its ability to capture the

long-term effects of CSR initiatives on employee engagement. Future research could employ longitudinal methods to examine these impacts over time. Moreover, exploring other mediators and moderators, such as organizational culture, leadership styles, or employee demographics, could provide a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which CSR influences engagement. These directions for future research will help to address existing gaps and further enrich the academic discourse on CSR and employee engagement.

Conclusion

This study underscores the strategic significance of CSR in driving employee engagement, particularly in the service sector. By aligning CSR initiatives with employee needs, organizations can cultivate a more committed and productive workforce. These findings not only contribute to academic literature but also offer actionable insights for practitioners and policymakers aiming to create sustainable business practices. Future research should expand on these findings to further unravel the complexities of CSR-employee engagement relationships across diverse contexts.

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