

THE IMPACT OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY ON EMPLOYER BRANDING

Aleksandra KEPKA

University of Bielsko-Biala; d21@student.ubb.edu.pl, ORCID: 0009-0001-4652-1923

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to examine the relationship between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Employer Branding (EB). The study aims to identify how CSR contributes to building an attractive employer image, which CSR dimensions are most influential, and whether differences exist across industries, regions, and employee profiles.

Design/methodology/approach: The paper is based on a systematic literature review of peer-reviewed articles and empirical studies published in recent years. The analysis was structured around four research questions, focusing on the conceptual links between CSR and EB, the impact of CSR on employer attractiveness, the role of specific CSR dimensions (social, ethical, environmental), and contextual differences across sectors and cultures.

Findings: The review shows that CSR is a significant antecedent of Employer Branding, strengthening reputation, attractiveness, and employee loyalty. Social and ethical dimensions (e.g., employee well-being, diversity, fairness) have the strongest impact, while environmental practices gain importance in contexts under ecological pressure. CSR enhances trust and identification among candidates and employees, but its effectiveness depends on authenticity and consistency of communication. Differences in perception are observed across industries, regions, and employee profiles, indicating that CSR is not a universal tool.

Research limitations/implications: The study is limited by the scope of available literature and the diversity of methodological approaches in the reviewed articles. Future research should include comparative empirical studies across cultures, industries, and generations to better understand when CSR strengthens EB and when its impact is limited.

Practical implications: The findings suggest that organizations should tailor CSR communication to their sector and cultural context. Authentic and consistent CSR practices can enhance recruitment outcomes, reduce turnover, and strengthen employee loyalty.

Social implications: CSR practices that emphasize inclusivity, employee well-being, and environmental responsibility contribute to shaping positive public attitudes toward organizations and support broader societal goals such as diversity, sustainability, and ethical business conduct.

Originality/value: This paper contributes to the literature by synthesizing existing research on CSR as a driver of Employer Branding. It highlights the multidimensional nature of CSR and its varying impact depending on cultural, sectoral, and employee contexts, providing value for both scholars and practitioners.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility; CSR; Employer Branding; Employee Attractiveness; Organizational Reputation; Sustainability.

Category of the paper: Literature review.

1. Introduction

Contemporary enterprises increasingly face the challenge of competing not only for customers but also for employees. In the context of dynamic social and economic changes, the importance of socially responsible activities is steadily growing, and these have become an integral element of management strategies. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is no longer perceived merely as an additional image-building activity; instead, it is increasingly regarded as a foundation for building organizational trust and reputation.

Alongside the concept of CSR, the notion of Employer Branding has been evolving, understood as the deliberate shaping of a company's image as an attractive workplace. Both job candidates and employees increasingly pay attention not only to employment conditions or opportunities for professional development, but also to the values represented by the organization. These values are particularly important for generations currently entering the labor market. As a result, CSR initiatives addressing environmental, social, and ethical issues play a growing role in employer brand building, influencing decisions related to taking up or continuing employment.

The number of publications concerning CSR and Employer Branding has grown steadily in recent years; however, the relationship between these concepts has not yet been fully clarified. Existing studies indicate that perceptions of this relationship may vary depending on industry and geographical context. The literature also emphasizes the need for more in-depth analyses to identify which CSR dimensions—environmental, social, or ethical—are most relevant for shaping the employer brand.

The originality of this study lies in systematically linking Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Employer Branding (EB) through a comprehensive review of fifty studies published between 2010 and 2025. The article provides a novel synthesis, highlighting the conceptual mechanisms and contextual factors that connect CSR with employer attractiveness. By identifying and systematizing gaps in the existing literature—such as the heterogeneity of CSR dimensions and the limited consideration of cultural, industry, and generational differences—this study clarifies current knowledge and highlights directions for future research, offering both theoretical contributions and practical guidance for organizations seeking to strengthen their employer image.

The purpose of this paper is to conduct a systematic literature review on the relationship between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Employer Branding. The analysis is guided by the following research questions:

1. How does the academic literature describe the links between CSR and Employer Branding?
2. How does CSR influence the perception of an organization as an attractive employer among candidates and employees?

3. Which CSR dimensions (social, ethical, environmental) are considered crucial for employer brand building?
4. Are there differences in the perceived impact of CSR on Employer Branding depending on industry, geographical region, or employee profile?

The systematic literature review provides answers to these questions, highlighting the main connections between the two concepts and identifying areas that require further research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Bowen (1953) was one of the first authors to attempt to define CSR, emphasizing that “it refers to the obligations of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society” (Bowen, 1953, p. 6).

Davis (1960) stressed that social responsibility refers to “businessmen’s decisions and actions taken for reasons at least partially beyond the firm’s direct economic or technical interest” (Davis, 1960, p. 70). He also introduced the concept known as the *Iron Law of Responsibility*, according to which the social responsibility of enterprises (organizations) should be proportional to their social power. In a later work, he argued that “the substance of social responsibility arises from concern for the ethical consequences of one’s acts as they might affect the interests of others” (Davis, 1967, p. 46).

McGuire (1963) expanded earlier approaches to CSR, pointing out that “the idea of social responsibilities supposes that the corporation has not only economic and legal obligations but also certain responsibilities to society which extend beyond these obligations” (McGuire, 1963, p. 144).

Carroll (1979) recognized that earlier definitions of CSR required supplementation and systematization; therefore, he proposed a four-dimensional model in which corporate social responsibility “encompasses the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time” (Carroll, 1979, p. 500).

The European Commission in 2011 proposed one of the simpler definitions of CSR, describing it as “the responsibility of enterprises for their impact on society” (European Commission, 2011). Later, however, the Commission decided to broaden this definition, suggesting that “corporate social responsibility refers to businesses taking responsibility for their behaviour and its impact on society. This can include employment conditions and labour standards, freedom of association, well-being at work, non-discrimination and gender balance, stakeholder engagement, human rights, preventing environmental harm, including reducing

emissions and pollution, and eliminating bribery and corruption” (European Commission, 2024).

In summary, CSR has evolved from a moral obligation of entrepreneurs to a comprehensive strategy encompassing economic, legal, ethical, and environmental aspects. Today, it constitutes a key element in building reputation and social trust, particularly in the face of the growing role of social media and the expectations of younger generations. Therefore, organizations that care about their reputation and social trust should consistently fulfill their commitments and minimize their negative impact on the environment.

2.2. Employer Branding (EB)

Employer Branding emerged when marketing principles were first applied to employee recruitment. Ambler and Barrow (1996) defined it as “the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company” (Lievens et al., 2007, pp. 46-48). Backhaus and Tikoo later expanded the concept, describing it as “the process of building an identifiable and unique employer identity” (Backhaus, Tikoo, 2004, p. 502). From the outset, Employer Branding was perceived as a tool that enabled companies to stand out from their competitors.

Employer Branding shapes the image of an organization as an ideal workplace in the eyes of both current and prospective employees. A strong employer brand is consistent, attractive, and distinctive. Consistency refers to the extent to which the employer brand is implemented reliably over time and across different stakeholder groups, while attractiveness reflects the degree of interest the brand generates among employees and candidates (Moroko, Uncles, 2008).

Increasingly, job seekers compare their needs, personalities, and values with the employer’s image. Employer Branding allows organizations to differentiate themselves by attracting candidates whose values align with those of the company (Foster, 2010).

Contemporary perspectives treat Employer Branding as a strategic process. Theurer et al. defined it as “the process of strategically promoting the employer brand externally and internally, using brand marketing activities with the aim of establishing the desired employer image in the organization’s target groups” (Theurer et al., 2018, p. 159). Similarly, Divya and Venkatalakshmi describe Employer Branding as a strategic effort to create a unique workplace that attracts candidates with the skills needed to achieve organizational goals. They emphasize that effective Employer Branding facilitates recruitment and retention, making the organization distinctive by securing talent and reducing turnover. In recent years, research on Employer Branding has gained momentum due to the intense competition for talent and the pursuit of becoming an employer of choice (Divya, Venkatalakshmi, 2023).

In summary, Employer Branding has evolved from a simple package of employee benefits into a strategic process of building a unique employer identity. Today, it is a key instrument in the competition for talent and in strengthening organizational advantage, with CSR initiatives serving to further enhance its effectiveness.

2.3. Operational Definitions in This Paper

For the purposes of this study, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is defined as a strategic approach that integrates economic objectives with environmental, social, and ethical considerations. CSR is understood here not merely as a set of voluntary initiatives, but as a systematic commitment to minimizing negative externalities and enhancing organizational accountability toward stakeholders.

Employer Branding (EB) is operationalized as the process of shaping and communicating the image of an organization as an attractive workplace. In this paper, EB is treated as a strategic instrument that influences both current and prospective employees' perceptions of the organization, emphasizing consistency, distinctiveness, and alignment with employee values.

This study assumes that socially responsible activities constitute a significant asset in building a strong employer brand. The operational definitions provided above establish the conceptual framework for subsequent analysis and enable a coherent linkage between CSR and EB throughout the paper.

3. Methods

3.1. Search strategy

A systematic literature review was conducted using two leading databases, Scopus and Web of Science. The choice of these databases was based on their broad coverage and the high quality of the scientific journals they index.

3.2. Scopus

In the Scopus database, the search was restricted to the fields *Article title*, *Abstract*, and *Keywords*, applying the following keywords: “CSR”, “employer branding”, and “corporate social responsibility”. The time frame covered the years 2010-2025, reflecting the fact that in 2010 the ISO 26000 standard related to the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) was published, which became an important reference point for subsequent research. Additional restrictions included: *Document type: Article* and *Language: English*. Applying these criteria resulted in the identification of 48 articles.

3.3. Web of Science

In the Web of Science database, the search was conducted in the *Topic* field, which includes title, abstract, and keywords. The keywords applied were: “CSR”, “employer branding”, and “corporate social responsibility”. The time frame also covered the years 2010-2025, and the document type was limited to *Article*. This search yielded 28 articles.

3.4. Selection process

In total, 76 publications were identified (48 in Scopus and 28 in Web of Science). After removing duplicates, 66 articles remained. The selection process was then carried out based on titles and abstracts, followed by full-text screening. The analysis of full texts was conducted in relation to the research questions formulated in the *Introduction*, which allowed for a systematic linkage of the literature to the study’s objectives and the identification of research gaps. The selection process is illustrated in the figure below.

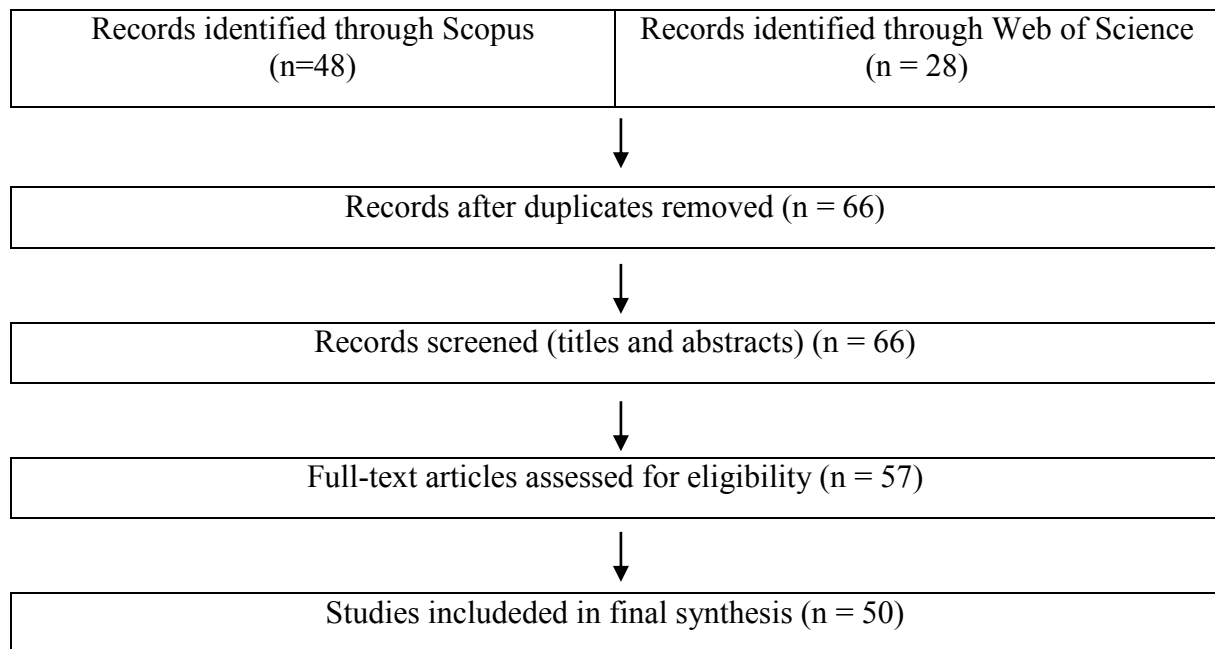


Figure 1. Stages of identification, selection, evaluation, and synthesis of studies.

4. Results

The findings of the systematic literature review were structured around the four research questions formulated in the study. Each subsection presents the results corresponding to a specific question, drawing on the analysis of articles identified and selected during the screening process. This approach ensures that the outcomes are directly linked to the research objectives and provides a coherent framework for discussing the relationship between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Employer Branding.

Results for RQ1: How does the academic literature describe the links between CSR and Employer Branding?

Biswas and Suar (2016) examined 209 companies in India and demonstrated that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) constitutes a significant antecedent of Employer Branding (EB). CSR, alongside the leadership of top management and perceived organizational prestige, emerged as one of the strongest predictors of EB. Their analysis revealed that organizational engagement in CSR positively influences all three dimensions of EB: Employer Brand Equity, Attraction and Retention of Talents, and Employer Brand Loyalty and Employee Engagement.

Corporate culture, grounded in ethical values and stakeholder relations, provides the foundation for building employer reputation (Kotras, 2010). CSR is treated as a tool of both internal and external communication, strengthening the image of the company as a responsible and attractive employer. The way CSR is communicated further shapes the perceived personality of the brand (Kotras, 2010; Ganucci Cancellieri et al., 2017).

Qualitative research has shown that digital communication and employer branding are increasingly linked to CSR practices. Organizations use internal communication and social media to promote socially responsible behaviors (e.g., combating discrimination, sustainable development), making CSR an integral element of EB that enhances reputation and employee loyalty (Fernandes et al., 2023).

CSR strengthens employer attractiveness by improving engagement and retention (Taulikar, Mali, 2016; Florez, Kanzler, 2025). Socially responsible companies are perceived as more attractive and trustworthy (Hinson et al., 2018; Bielicka et al., 2021; Mishra, Chakraborty, 2021; Yasin et al., 2023; Kuo et al., 2024). However, Kozak (2018) emphasizes that while CSR increases employer attractiveness, its significance may vary across generations, as younger employees expect greater involvement.

Buzzao and Rizzi (2024) presented CSR as a symbolic attribute of the employer brand, highlighting that candidates perceive CSR as evidence of ethicality and responsibility. A SEM study conducted by Kumar et al. (2021) revealed a strong, positive, and significant relationship between CSR and Employer Branding, with a large effect size, meaning that higher levels of CSR are associated with stronger EB. Similar results were reported by Khan et al. (2024).

Millennials in Indonesia positively perceive corporate CSR engagement, indicating that it can significantly increase applications to socially responsible firms (Hakam, 2024). Candidates—particularly “talents”—actively seek CSR content during recruitment and treat it as a cultural signal of value alignment and employer reputation. CSR is increasingly seen as a standard rather than a “unique benefit”, and its absence reduces employer attractiveness. HR professionals confirm the growing importance of CSR in recruitment but note that communication is often not tailored to the specific expectations of talents (Boehncke, 2025).

CSR is regarded as a symbolic element of the employer brand that complements instrumental factors (salary, benefits) and influences perceived person–organization fit (P–O fit), which is crucial for employer attractiveness. EB gains strength when CSR aligns with candidate values (Klimkiewicz, Oltra, 2017; Nanjundeswaraswamy et al., 2022; Szegedi et al., 2023). Nyborg and Zhang (2013) found that firms with strong CSR reputations attract employees despite offering lower wages, suggesting that CSR enhances employer branding by enabling organizations to compete not only on pay but also on reputation. Similar findings were reported by Barbara et al. (2019) and Le & Morschett (2024), who showed that CSR can be as important as compensation, with candidates willing to accept lower salaries in exchange for working at a company with a strong CSR reputation.

Bonaiuto et al. (2013) emphasized that attributes related to ethics and social responsibility are integral to the employer brand and particularly important for attracting talent. Afrahi et al. (2025) reached similar conclusions, noting that CSR strengthens employee attachment to the organization, builds pride, and increases willingness to recommend the employer to others—an essential element of EB. Interviews with SME owners conducted by Szegedi et al. (2023) also revealed that CSR and EB are closely intertwined, with CSR perceived as the foundation of organizational reputation and culture, both critical for attracting and retaining employees.

Various studies highlight that CSR plays an important role in employer brand building, though its significance is interpreted differently. Chopra et al. (2022) identified socially responsible practices as one of five key factors that make a company attractive as a workplace. Nanjundeswaraswamy et al. (2022) similarly emphasized CSR as an integral element of employer image. Francis et al. (2025), analyzing the IT sector, observed that while CSR was not the strongest predictor of organizational attractiveness, it functioned as a symbolic attribute that reinforced company reputation and values, thereby enhancing credibility in the eyes of employees.

Carlini et al. (2019) demonstrated that CSR is treated as a key signal in the employer branding process. Referring to signaling theory, they argued that EB effectiveness depends on the consistency between external signaling (CSR employer brand identity) and internal experience (internal CSR). Azimi et al. (2023) found that CSR has a strong and positive impact on Employer Brand Personality Appeal (EBPA), meaning that CSR not only improves organizational reputation but also enhances employer attractiveness through the perceived “personality” of the brand. CSR also directly influences employee satisfaction and reduces turnover intentions. Content analyses of global firms revealed that CSR is one of the key dimensions of EB and that companies frequently publish CSR initiatives to strengthen employer brand perception. CSR in the digital space has become a tool for building employer reputation and attractiveness among both potential and current employees (Temel, Esen, 2024).

Nevertheless, some studies suggest limitations. Research in the Indian IT sector indicated that CSR does not significantly influence candidate application decisions and does not enhance EB effectiveness (Punn, 2020). Bustamante et al. (2021) similarly argued that while CSR

contributes to employer attractiveness, its impact on EB is selective. Klimkiewicz (2014) also noted that although positive attitudes toward CSR are linked to choosing responsible employers and rejecting those violating CSR principles, salary and working conditions remain the most decisive factors for potential employees.

Results for RQ2: How does CSR influence the perception of an organization as an attractive employer among candidates and employees?

CSR and sustainability practices are integral elements of Employer Branding, supporting both recruitment and employee loyalty (Andruszkiewicz et al., 2024). Research findings indicate that CSR strengthens organizational reputation, increases attractiveness and prestige (Biswas, Suar, 2016; Ganucci Cancellieri et al., 2017; Ibrahim, 2017; Buzzao, Rizzi, 2024), as it enables both candidates and employees to experience greater alignment between their personal values and those of the company (Miethlich, 2022). Andruszkiewicz et al. (2024) emphasize that CSR communication confirms organizational values by demonstrating care for the local community, the environment, and employees. Puncheva-Michelotti et al. (2018) add that CSR communication in recruitment advertisements serves as a signal to potential candidates about organizational values.

However, studies reveal that CSR in recruitment advertisements is often used in a limited and inconsistent manner, which prevents its full potential in Employer Branding from being realized (Wołodźko, Woźniak, 2017; Puncheva-Michelotti et al., 2018). The absence of CSR in internal and external communication may be perceived as a signal that the organization does not care about public opinion, negatively affecting its image as a potential employer (Bielicka et al., 2021).

CSR communicated through digital channels (social media, internal communication) enhances perceived employer attractiveness by building the image of a company that is responsible and cares for employee well-being. Yet interview results show that the mere presence of CSR in communication does not always translate into stronger emotional attachment among employees; while Employer Branding is positively evaluated, emotional bonds remain limited (Fernandes et al., 2023).

Stronger Employer Branding, reinforced by CSR, positively impacts non-financial outcomes such as higher employee satisfaction, more applications, and lower turnover, as well as financial outcomes such as higher return on assets (Biswas, Suar, 2016). Importantly, studies by Nyborg and Zhang (2013) and Le and Morschett (2024) demonstrated that employees are willing to accept lower wages to work for companies with a strong CSR reputation.

CSR is considered one of the key dimensions of organizational attractiveness and directly supports Employer Branding by building a positive employer image (Bendaravičienė, Vitkauskas, 2024; Gandasari et al., 2024; Salim, Widhianto, 2024). Research shows that organizations with strong CSR are perceived as more fair and responsible, which strengthens their reputation and attractiveness in the eyes of employees (Kumar et al., 2021; Bendaravičienė, Vitkauskas, 2024; Khan et al., 2024).

A study conducted on a sample of over 300 Millennials in Poland revealed that individuals with positive attitudes toward CSR perceive socially responsible organizations as more attractive. Conversely, candidates with strong prosocial engagement are more likely to reject offers from companies that fail to meet basic CSR standards. Candidate emotions toward CSR (e.g., pride, lack of trust) significantly influence recruitment decisions (Klimkiewicz, Oltra, 2017).

CSR provides employees with information about organizational values and principles, influencing their application decisions and engagement. In the IT sector, professionals prefer employers with strong CSR involvement, perceiving them as more ethical and stable. Results show that CSR correlates with organizational attractiveness, although prestige and workplace happiness were found to be more influential (Francis et al., 2025).

CSR, understood as ethical actions toward employees and the broader community, enhances organizational credibility and trust. Employees who participate in developing ethical codes or CSR programs identify more strongly with the company and demonstrate greater loyalty. External stakeholders (e.g., job candidates) perceive firms as more attractive when CSR is authentic and embedded in organizational culture (Kotras, 2010). CSR directly influences employer attractiveness, as employees feel pride and purpose in working for a responsible organization. Perceptions of the company as socially responsible and ethical increase employee satisfaction and loyalty (Bharadwaj, Yameen, 2020; Nanjundeswaraswamy et al., 2022).

For candidates, CSR signals increase application intentions (Ibrahim, 2017; Soleha, Satrya, 2024) by fostering pride, value alignment, and organizational reputation. Uncontrolled sources (e.g., media, rankings) may further reinforce or undermine the perceived authenticity of CSR. For current employees, CSR influences satisfaction, organizational identification, and loyalty—provided that internal experiences confirm CSR promises. Inconsistency, however, leads to negative outcomes such as reduced trust or increased turnover intentions (Carlini et al., 2019).

Similar findings were reported by Boehncke (2025), who noted that candidates identified as talents perceive CSR initiatives as enhancing employer attractiveness when communicated credibly and supported by evidence (e.g., reports or concrete initiatives). He also emphasized that overly promotional communication generates skepticism and reduces organizational attractiveness, suggesting the need for discreet, evidence-based CSR communication. Boehncke further observed that CSR plays a particularly important role in the early stages of the recruitment funnel—at the awareness level—and in the onboarding process of new employees (Boehncke, 2025). Nevertheless, some studies indicate that although CSR has a strong and significant impact on Employer Branding, it does not directly influence application intentions (Gandasari et al., 2024; Salim, Widhianto, 2024).

Results for RQ3: Which CSR dimensions (social, ethical, environmental) are considered crucial for employer brand building?

Biswas and Suar (2016) measured CSR using a scale that encompassed stakeholder-related activities; however, they analyzed CSR as a single construct without examining the separate impact of individual dimensions on Employer Branding. Puncheva-Michelotti et al. (2018) emphasized that diversity, inclusiveness, and employee development were the most frequently highlighted aspects in recruitment advertisements, while environmental issues and community relations were marginalized—with environmental aspects almost entirely absent.

The most important CSR dimensions identified in a study conducted by Bonaiuto et al. in Italy included ethical responsibility, employee well-being, diversity and inclusion, and good governance. Candidates, particularly highly talented ones, considered these elements crucial for employer attractiveness (Bonaiuto et al., 2013). A study involving employees and firms in Norway revealed that gender equality, as well as ethical and social standards, were key dimensions shaping perceptions of employer attractiveness (Nyborg, Zhang, 2013). Khan et al. (2024), examining the banking sector in Pakistan, found that ethical and environmental dimensions were particularly significant for reputation and Employer Branding.

Research conducted among young labor market participants in Poland showed that legal and ethical aspects of CSR were especially important to them, and violations of these led to a loss of trust and even rejection of job offers (Klimkiewicz, 2014). Another study in Poland indicated that the dimensions most strongly enhancing employer attractiveness included: employee support (promoting good relations, transparent bonus rules, equal treatment); relations with local communities (supporting schools/clubs and improving local living conditions); ethics and law (compliance with regulations); and environmental actions (e.g., clean-up initiatives, waste management). Concrete examples of CSR activities were found to increase attractiveness more than general declarations or external sponsorship alone (Kotras, 2010; Wołodźko, Woźniak, 2017).

Cid-Bouzo et al. (2025) demonstrated that the environmental dimension of CSR is directly linked to employer attractiveness, with companies holding ISO 14001 certification receiving higher CSR scores in job attractiveness rankings, thereby strengthening reputation and Employer Branding. Other studies also highlight the importance of the environmental dimension (e.g., sustainable development, minimizing negative environmental impact), while additionally emphasizing ethical (e.g., fair business practices, absence of corruption scandals) and social dimensions (e.g., fair treatment of employees and suppliers, human rights, equality) (Kotras, 2010; Carlini et al., 2019; Garai-Fodor et al., 2021; Chopra et al., 2022; Azimi et al., 2023; Szegedi et al., 2023; Fernandes et al., 2023; Yasin et al., 2023; Temel, Esen, 2024; Le, Morschett, 2024; Buzzao, Rizzi, 2024; Hakam et al., 2024; Andruszkiewicz et al., 2024; Bendaravičienė, Vitkauskas, 2024; Francis et al., 2025; Boehncke, 2025). The strongest impact on Employer Branding was observed in CSR activities directed specifically toward employees (Jain, 2013; Kotras, 2010; Stuss, 2018; Bharadwaj, Yameen, 2020; Bustamante et al., 2021;

Szegedi et al., 2023; Yasin et al., 2023; Temel, Esen, 2024; Afrahi et al., 2025). Bustamante et al. (2021) found that CSR enhances employer attractiveness only when it relates to employee well-being. Conversely, Salanță et al. (2019) revealed that employees were more interested in CSR campaigns targeting society at large.

Studies consistently show that CSR practices in the social and ethical domains are crucial for building Employer Branding. The most frequently cited valuable CSR activities include training and reskilling, occupational health and safety, transparency, anti-corruption measures, and stakeholder information provision. These actions enhance employer attractiveness because they are perceived as genuine care for employees, while also strengthening trust and reputation, which indirectly increases attractiveness (Caha et al., 2024). Other studies confirmed that social and ethical values—such as honesty, equality, human rights, employment of people with disabilities, and prosocial initiatives—are essential for employer attractiveness (Miethlich, 2022; Nanjundeswaraswamy et al., 2022; Azimi et al., 2023).

A study by Seara et al. (2023), conducted in Portugal primarily among young people, highlighted the significant role of employee volunteering, emphasizing that it is crucial for Employer Branding. Employees become more loyal and perceive the organization as more attractive when they have opportunities to engage in volunteering (Garai-Fodor et al., 2021; Seara et al., 2023). Miethlich (2022) further noted that companies supporting people with disabilities are perceived as more ethical and attractive. He argued that integrating vocational rehabilitation (CSR) with Employer Branding can create added value, with outcomes such as loyalty and inclusiveness aligning with Employer Branding goals and enabling organizations to build an authentic image of a “caring employer”.

Results for RQ4: Are there differences in the perceived impact of CSR on Employer Branding depending on industry, geographic region, or employee profile?

The study conducted by Biswas and Suar did not reveal significant differences in the strength of the relationship between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Employer Branding across different industries (manufacturing and services), nor between public and private enterprises. This suggests that, in the Indian context, CSR functions as a universal factor enhancing Employer Branding regardless of the sector of activity (Biswas, Suar, 2016). Similar results were obtained by Bendaravičienė and Vitkauskas (2024), who found no significant differences in CSR assessments between employees in the public and private sectors.

Findings from Puncheva-Michelotti et al. (2018) in the United States indicate sectoral differences: the financial sector communicated CSR to the least extent, while companies in healthcare and education naturally emphasized their positive social impact. Importantly, CSR was more prominently presented on corporate websites than in recruitment advertisements, highlighting inconsistencies in communication directed at candidates.

Nyborg and Zhang's study of Norwegian firms, situated in the Scandinavian context, emphasized that CSR is strongly linked to gender equality policies and high social standards. However, the authors suggested that the effect of CSR on wages and attractiveness may vary across industries (Nyborg, Zhang, 2013).

In Central and Western Europe, research conducted on small and medium-sized enterprises in the fashion industry—where sustainability pressures are particularly high—showed that CSR is a key element of Employer Branding. Owners of firms in Central Europe more often associated CSR with voluntarism, whereas in Western countries the emphasis was placed on stakeholder impact and ethical business practices (Szegedi et al., 2023).

A comparative study of business and management students in the USA and Vietnam revealed cultural differences: U.S. students placed greater importance on the social and environmental aspects of CSR, while Vietnamese students valued financial stability, fair business practices, and the absence of corruption scandals more highly (Le, Morschett, 2024).

Research conducted in Germany by Boehncke (2025) indicated that industry differences may be significant. Candidates from humanities and social sciences more frequently regarded CSR as a key element of employer attractiveness, interpreting it as a signal of ethicality and value alignment. By contrast, candidates from technical fields (e.g., engineering, IT) paid less attention to CSR and placed greater emphasis on innovation, originality, and technological advancement.

Afrahi et al. (2025), in a study across various sectors in Germany, found that CSR was particularly important in healthcare and manufacturing, where employees strongly responded to working conditions and safety. In technology and communications industries, development and innovation played a greater role, although CSR still reinforced employee attachment to the firm.

Andruszkiewicz et al. (2024) observed that manual workers rated financial and social support programs more highly, whereas office employees more often emphasized the importance of ecological and educational initiatives. Miethlich (2022) further demonstrated that CSR has greater significance for Employer Branding in sectors characterized by a high share of physical labor and health-related risks.

5. Discussion

The literature indicates that CSR is one of the key antecedents of employer branding, alongside leadership and organizational prestige (Biswas, Suar, 2016; Kumar et al., 2021). It strengthens employer reputation and attractiveness, supports employee loyalty, and serves as a tool of both internal and external communication (Kotras, 2010; Fernandes et al., 2023). Candidates increasingly perceive CSR as a standard, the absence of which reduces employer

attractiveness, while CSR reputation can compensate for lower wages (Nyborg, Zhang, 2013). At the same time, the effectiveness of CSR depends on the authenticity of actions and the consistency of communication. In some industries its impact is selective, while salary and working conditions remain decisive factors (Punn, 2020; Klimkiewicz, 2014). CSR is strongly linked to employer branding, enhancing reputation, attractiveness, and employee loyalty, but its effectiveness is conditioned by authenticity, communication consistency, and cultural or generational expectations. In certain industries CSR plays a symbolic role, while in others its influence on candidate decisions is limited.

The literature further demonstrates that CSR plays a crucial role in shaping employer image, supporting recruitment and employee loyalty (Biswas, Suar, 2016; Miethlich, 2022). CSR enhances organizational reputation and attractiveness, and CSR communication signals organizational values to candidates, although inconsistency weakens its potential in employer branding (Puncheva-Michelotti et al., 2018; Wołodźko, Woźniak, 2017). Stronger employer branding supported by CSR leads to higher satisfaction, more applications, and lower turnover (Biswas, Suar, 2016), while in some contexts CSR reputation compensates for lower pay (Nyborg, Zhang, 2013). CSR also influences candidate emotions, building trust and organizational identification (Klimkiewicz, Oltra, 2017). However, its effectiveness depends on authenticity and communication consistency—an overly promotional tone generates skepticism, and inconsistency undermines employer branding (Boehncke, 2025). CSR strengthens employer attractiveness through reputation, value alignment, candidate emotions, and employee loyalty, but inconsistency may erode trust and weaken employer branding.

Research shows that different CSR dimensions have varying significance for employer branding, depending on cultural, industry, and employee contexts. Social and employee-related activities—well-being, workplace safety, training, and diversity—exert the strongest influence, as they are perceived as direct care for employees (Bonaiuto et al., 2013; Caha et al., 2024). Ethics remains a fundamental pillar of employer branding: honesty, compliance with law, and anti-corruption, with violations leading to loss of candidate trust (Klimkiewicz, 2014; Miethlich, 2022). The environmental dimension plays a more differentiated role—marginalized in some studies, but considered crucial in contexts subject to ecological pressures (Cid-Bouzo et al., 2025). Additionally, volunteering and inclusiveness strengthen employee loyalty and build an authentic image of a “caring employer” (Seara et al., 2023). Overall, CSR activities directed at employees have the strongest impact, though the importance of ethical and environmental dimensions grows depending on context. Authenticity, concreteness, and alignment with candidate values are essential.

Studies also highlight that the impact of CSR on employer branding differs across cultural and industry contexts. In India and Lithuania, CSR acted as a universal factor enhancing employer attractiveness regardless of sector (Biswas, Suar, 2016). In the USA and Germany, clear differences emerged—financial and technology industries emphasized CSR less,

while healthcare, education, and manufacturing highlighted it more strongly (Puncheva-Michelotti et al., 2018). In Scandinavia, CSR is closely tied to gender equality and high social standards, while in Central and Western Europe differences concern interpretation—CSR as voluntarism versus obligation toward stakeholders (Szegegi et al., 2023). Expectations are also culturally conditioned—Americans emphasize social and environmental aspects, while Vietnamese students value financial stability and business integrity (Le, Morschett, 2024). The nature of work further shapes CSR perception—manual workers appreciate financial and social support, while office employees emphasize ecological and educational initiatives (Miethlich, 2022). CSR is not a uniform tool of employer branding—its significance and reception depend on industry, region, and employee profile. In some contexts it acts universally, while in others it differentiates employer attractiveness according to cultural and occupational expectations.

The literature review highlights areas requiring further exploration. First, there is a lack of conclusive evidence regarding the role of authenticity and communication consistency in shaping candidate decisions and employee loyalty. Second, the significance of individual CSR dimensions (social, ethical, environmental) in shaping employer attractiveness across cultural and industry contexts remains insufficiently studied. Third, generational and profile differences—for example, between manual and office workers or candidates from humanities versus technical fields—are rarely considered. These gaps point to the need for further empirical research to better understand under what conditions CSR strengthens employer branding and when its impact is limited.

Limitations

A limitation of this review is the heterogeneity of measurement approaches across studies. While some research treats CSR as a single construct, others differentiate between social, ethical, and environmental dimensions, leading to inconsistent findings. Moreover, differences in communication channels (e.g., recruitment advertisements vs. corporate websites) further complicate comparability. This diversity reduces methodological transparency and makes synthesis challenging. Future research should adopt standardized frameworks or meta-analytic techniques to enhance comparability and reliability.

Future Research Agenda

Future research should explore under what conditions CSR strengthens employer branding and when its impact is limited. In particular, studies should examine the role of authenticity and communication consistency in shaping candidate decisions and employee loyalty. Further work is needed to assess the relative importance of social, ethical, and environmental CSR dimensions across industries and cultural contexts. Generational and occupational differences—such as between manual and office workers or humanities versus technical

candidates—also require systematic investigation. Addressing these gaps would provide a more nuanced understanding of CSR’s role in employer branding.

6. Summary

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is an integral component of employer branding, although its significance varies depending on cultural, industry, and generational contexts. Research indicates that CSR enhances employer attractiveness, strengthens organizational reputation, and fosters employee loyalty; however, its effectiveness depends on the authenticity of actions, the consistency of communication, and alignment with the values of candidates and employees.

Social and ethical initiatives—such as employee well-being, workplace safety, diversity, and integrity—exert the strongest influence, as they are perceived as direct care for employees and as the foundation of trust. The environmental dimension is gaining increasing importance in contexts subject to ecological pressures, while volunteering and inclusiveness further reinforce loyalty and contribute to building an authentic image of a “caring employer”.

CSR, however, is not a universal tool. In some cultures it operates cross-sectorally, while in others it differentiates employer attractiveness depending on industry, region, and employee profile. The nature of work (manual versus office-based) also shapes CSR perception. In practice, this means that organizations should tailor CSR communication to sector-specific characteristics and cultural expectations in order to effectively build an attractive employer image.

Theoretical Implications

This review advances the understanding of CSR as a multidimensional antecedent of employer branding. It demonstrates that social, ethical, and environmental CSR dimensions exert differentiated effects depending on cultural, industry, and employee contexts. The findings contribute to signaling theory by showing that CSR functions as a symbolic attribute of employer branding, shaping candidate perceptions through authenticity, communication consistency, and value alignment. Moreover, the review highlights the need for standardized measurement frameworks to address heterogeneity in CSR operationalizations, thereby strengthening methodological transparency in future research.

Practical Implications

For practitioners, the findings provide guidance on how to integrate CSR into employer branding strategies. Organizations should prioritize employee-related CSR activities as these exert the strongest influence on employer attractiveness. CSR communication must be

authentic, consistent, and evidence-based; overly promotional messages generate skepticism and reduce credibility. Integrating CSR into recruitment strategies, onboarding processes, and internal communication builds trust and loyalty. Importantly, CSR reputation can compensate for lower wages, offering firms a competitive advantage in talent acquisition. Tailoring CSR communication to generational and occupational expectations further enhances effectiveness.

Future Research Directions

The findings also highlight the need for further comparative research to better understand differences in CSR perception across cultures, industries, and generations. Future studies should examine the role of authenticity and communication consistency in shaping candidate decisions and employee loyalty, assess the relative importance of CSR dimensions across contexts, and explore generational and occupational differences more systematically. Addressing these gaps would provide a more nuanced understanding of CSR's role in employer branding.

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