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From Responsibility to Reputation: How Corporate Social Responsibility and Communication Strategies Shape Employer Branding

Danish Mushtaq¹ Shahzadi Sattar² Sahar Hayat³ Ayesha Sajid Taga⁴

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Abstract

This study examines how corporate social responsibility (CSR) and communication strategies influence employer branding in the banking sector of South Punjab, Pakistan, through the mediating role of firm reputation. Grounded in Signaling Theory, the study proposes that CSR initiatives and communication practices signal organizational values to stakeholders, thereby shaping firm reputation, which in turn determines how a bank is perceived as an employer. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire from 172 employees working in public and private banks across South Punjab and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The measurement model demonstrated adequate reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Results confirmed all hypothesized relationships: both CSR ($\beta = 0.144$) and communication strategies ($\beta = 0.686$) significantly and positively predicted firm reputation, which in turn had a strong positive effect on employer branding ($\beta = 0.819$). Firm reputation was further found to mediate the relationships between CSR, communication strategies, and employer branding. The model explained 67.0% of the variance in firm reputation and 65.8% of the variance in employer branding. These findings suggest that banks operating in under-researched, non-WEIRD regional contexts such as South Punjab can strengthen their employer brand by investing in transparent communication and genuine CSR practices that build long-term reputational capital. Theoretical contributions, managerial implications, and directions for future research are discussed.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, Communication Strategies, Firm Reputation, Employer Branding, Banking Sector, South Punjab, PLS-SEM.

¹ PhD Scholar, Institute of Management Sciences Baha-ud-din Zakariya University, Multan, Punjab, Pakistan.

² Lecturer, NFC Institute of Engineering & Technology, Multan, Punjab, Pakistan.

³ Lecturer, NFC Institute of Engineering & Technology, Multan, Punjab, Pakistan.

⁴ Assistant Professor Sociology, Govt Graduate College of Home Economics Multan, Punjab, Pakistan.

Corresponding Author: Shahzadi Sattar, **Correspondence through:** shhzadi.sattar@nfciet.edu.pk



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Introduction

In today's highly competitive business environment, organizations increasingly recognize that the way they are perceived as employers significantly influences their ability to attract, recruit, and retain talented employees (Rosa et al., 2025). Consequently, employer branding has emerged as a strategic human resource management concept that defines an organization's identity as an employer and communicates its unique employee value proposition to both current and prospective employees (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Sandeepanie et al., 2023). According to Azhar et al., (2023) a strong employer brand not only enhances an organization's attractiveness in the labor market but also contributes to higher levels of employee satisfaction, organizational commitment, and overall performance. However, the effectiveness of employer branding depends not only on the organization's branding initiatives but also on how these initiatives shape stakeholders' perceptions of the organization. In this regard, firm reputation plays a crucial mediating role by translating employer branding efforts into favorable organizational outcomes. Firm reputation refers to the overall evaluation of an organization by its stakeholders, developed through past organizational actions and expectations regarding its future behavior (Binu, 2022). This reputation is influenced by various organizational practices, including corporate social responsibility (CSR), transparent communication, ethical conduct, and consistent organizational behavior, all of which strengthen stakeholders' trust and reinforce the effectiveness of employer branding.

CSR is becoming increasingly important in how society views organizations. Organizations that engage in ethical, environmental and social welfare initiatives contribute positively to the development of their imaginations, which contribute to their reputation (Nagiah & Mohd, 2024). Good communications allow organizations to communicate their goals and objectives, and achievements to their stakeholders in a manner that helps them maintain their reputation (Dowling, 2006). Even though these relationships have been receiving more attention, there is still a lack of empirical exploration into how CSR and communication strategies work together to affect employer branding through firm reputation. This study attempts to fill this gap by quantitatively analyzing the direct effects of CSR and communication strategies on firm reputation followed by the impact of firm reputation on employer branding. The study extends literature by integrating these relationships into a structured framework which explains how organizational practices may contribute to creating a strong employer brand. The results are intended to provide actionable recommendations for managers and policymakers trying to improve their firm's marketability as an employer.

Despite a growing trend of academic interest in constructs like communication strategies, CSR, firm reputation, and employer branding (B2B), empirical support for the constructs is mainly provided in studies conducted in WEIRD settings. It means that use of WEIRD sample populations in the course of research results in a lack of generalization of the findings in non-WEIRD settings where there is a significant difference in cultural, institutional, and socio-economic environments. The implication here is that the theoretical relationships examined in the Western context may work differently in emerging markets. Pakistan serves as an important case for non-WEIRD research; however, the empirical analysis of the subject matter in regional markets has been very limited. In particular, the South Punjab region has its specific socio-economic environment and organization-specific factors that can be considered in the current study, but which have not received due attention in the literature.

While past research indicates that proactive organizational practices, such as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives and communication strategies, are important to a firm's reputation,

the empirical work done so far has typically focused on either large firms or financial institutions located in urban environments. As a result, there is still a lack of insight into how these factors could play out in the reputation of regional banks, specifically in areas such as South Punjab. Additionally, this research will provide insight into how firm reputation can serve as an intermediary mechanism for employer branding as it relates to CSR and communication strategies. This has not yet been documented in the literature, particularly within localized, non-WEIRD contexts.

Thus, an important research gap is present in recognizing the role of CSR and communication strategies for development of firm reputation and development of employer branding through that firm reputation in the banking sector of South Punjab. To fill this gap, the current research uses the quantitative technique to empirically assess the framework proposed. Thus this study lines up existing theoretical frameworks in a context outside of WEIRD and offers managerial implications for banks wanting to improve their reputation-building capabilities and enhance their employer branding.

2. Literature Review

Communication Strategies and Firm Reputation

At the same time, communication strategies are interlinked with the way that organizations engage with stakeholders and issue management regarding perceptions about performance and (to some) credibility. Communications strategy in Organizational Studies is described as a planned process that creates messages, transmits them through various communication channels, and the receiver must interpret the message to accomplish the desired organizational behavior (Bukar et al., 2025). In banking, these strategies could entail internal communication with employees, external seeking outreach to customers and the public at large (i.e. public relations), crisis communication, and digital engagement in the social media space (Hetze & Winistorfer 2016). Timely communication increases transparency, closes the gap between banks and stakeholder trust (a major contributor to customer behaviour in financial services) and corporate image (Ahmad et al., 2021).

In banking, firm reputation is defined as the collective stakeholder's credibility assessment of how trustworthy, honest and ethical a bank is and its overall service quality (Mulki & Jaramillo, 2011). A strong reputation helps to gain customer loyalty and investor confidence, whereas a poor reputation can lead to loss of market share and stakeholder trust (Salam & Jahed, 2023). Studies provide abundant evidence for the positive impact of strategic communication to corporate reputation. As an example, Men and Tsai (2014) showed support for their proposition that frequent disclosure of corporate activities on social media enhances customer engagement and image when measured with quantitative methods. In similar Vein et al. (2012) conducted a regression based study on the reputation of financial institutions, finding that far greater reputation scores were recorded by banks with strong external communication practices and transparency disclosures coupled vigorous stakeholder dialogue (Martinez & Rodriguez del Bosque 2013).

As far as developing countries go, South Punjab presents a unique case with respect to the need for effective communication strategies due primarily to the socio-cultural and economic variables that define stakeholder expectations. Community-level patrons typically use both formal methods (i.e., advertisements, public service announcements) and informal methods (community connections, word-of-mouth) when developing conceptual models about suppliers' services (Brown et al., 2007). Previous studies of the overall banking industry in Pakistan have identified an array of characteristics regarding customer-facing communications (i.e. clarity, timely response

to customers) through digital media. These customer-facing communication channels contribute to trust in a particular institution or brand (Moraes & Schaefer, 2026). Knowledge of large-scale quantitative research concerning the banking sector in South Punjab is very limited; however, some evidence from Pakistan shows that banks that successfully employ effective strategic communication practices (e.g., transparent and consistent dissemination of information related to the resolution of complaints or crisis management plans as well as engaging digital content) experience positive public reputation results. Effectively communicating in the South Punjab banking context is an important factor that will determine the reputation of banks within this geographic region.

H1: There is a substantial and beneficial effects of communication strategies on bank reputation in South Punjab.

Corporate Social Responsibility and Reputation

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is developed as a strategic component that can improve organizational legitimacy and brand image, especially in service sectors where the foundation of trust is essential. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) refers to voluntary actions by a company towards societal, environmental and ethical welfare beyond its compliance obligations (Omidvar et al., 2026). In the banking domain, CSR signifies not an act of philanthropy but one is just further element of corporate strategy which signals ethical behavior and accountability to internal (employees) as well external stakeholder (Sethi et al., 2017). Especially for banks working in developing areas like South Punjab, which experience poverty and low financial literacy, CSR represents an important opportunity to show how much they care for the community which results in building faith with stakeholders.

Corporations who do more socially responsible are widely regarded as better staged businesses as supported in empirical research. Quantitative research has posited that CSR input can decrease the degree of information asymmetry between organizations and stakeholders (through signalling some minimal ethical standard or differential transaction costs for suppliers), which ultimately, is expected to improve corporate reputation among consumers and non-consumers alike (Cui et al., 2018). In their study on CSR in the banking sector context, Martinez and Rodríguez del Bosque (2013) shows a positive strong impact of CSR on reputation and customer loyalty, illustrating that customers have more favorable attitudes toward socially responsible banks. Similarly, in Pakistan financial sector CSR is found to enhance reputation and customer trust; banks with high CSR profile do benefit by having a more positive perception of themselves than their competitors (Khan et al., 2015).

CSR is also extremely important for South Punjab banking environment specifically because of local cultural norms that inspire community welfare and local socio-economic development. Banks that participate in CSR activities like financial literacy programs, community development, and ethical lending are better positioned to garner reputational advantages because banks are more likely to act ethically when they engage in the kind of activities society expects (Deigh et al., 2016). The evidence regarding loyalty based on the departments in banks in South Punjab is limited when specific large-scale quantitative data are considered, but overall evidence from Pakistan points towards CSR increasing shareholder trust and institutional reputation as key strategic variables for all your banking regional presence (Ahmad, 2017).

H2: The firm reputation on the banking sector of South Punjab is significantly and positively affected by Corporate Social Responsibility.

Firm Reputation and Branding of Employers

Business reputation is composed of the viewpoints of an organization by both external parties and internal parties; a perceived belief in the organization's credibility, performance, trustworthiness, and ethical behavior (Iwu & Ronald, 2010). The image of the bank is a major non-physical resource that can have a significant effect on clients' commitment to the business, investor confidence in the business, and the legitimacy of the organization (Gli, 2024). An organization's strong reputation creates stability and integrity in its institutions; this is critical in an industry where there is a high level of information asymmetry and services that require a high level of trust. Furthermore, reputation is also important to the human resources function, particularly in an employer branding context; thus, an organization's reputation impacts how potential employees and current employees view the organization as a place of employment.

Employer branding positions the organization not merely as an employer, but as a value proposition for current and prospective employees (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). A powerful employer brand enables firms to attract, retain and entice talented employees who are essential in reducing employee turnover and increasing organizational effectiveness. In the banking industry employer branding includes elements like culture, compensation, career development opportunities, ethical climate and reputation as an employer (Kaur et al., 2024). Studies show that the mental availability of employer branding is permeated by the overall corporate reputation since potential employees are using pronunciation signals like reliability, socially responsible behavior and corporate values for evaluating if they want to work with an organization or not.

First, based on empirical studies showing a positive quantitative link between firm reputation and employer branding outcomes. For example, they offer a few references from service industries that indicate that organizations with good reputations are more attractive to potential employees, and tend to have higher levels of job applicants, employee turnover and perceived organizational prestige (Bankins & Waterhouse 2019). Likewise, research set in the financial services sector finds that reputation is statistically significant for employer attractiveness (i.e., as stakeholders view a firm's reputation more positively, its employer brand becomes stronger; Brown et al., 2019). A positive reputation means the highest ethical standards, financial stability, and corporate social responsibilities, all of which job seekers and employees highly value in a banking employer. The results of structural equation modelling and correlation analyses highlight that reputation plays an important direct role in the perception of employer brand, especially job attractiveness and organizational commitment (Junca & Dias 2023).

Corporate reputation (as discussed previously) is considered as a significant driver of employer branding where employment opportunities are limited in the formal sector (e.g., South Punjab) due to changes in the labour market, and increased competition for skilled workers. In South Punjab, organizational stability, equity and trust play a major role in determining the cultural and socio-economic environment. Accordingly, banks that have developed a good reputation with respect to ethics and community/customer involvement are more likely to be perceived positively by prospective employees. While quantitative research has been somewhat restricted to the South Punjab region, studies using broad-based research from the banking sector across Pakistan have indicated that reputation has a positive impact on employer branding metrics, including turnover intentions and the attraction of job applicants. Therefore, we expect to find that there is a

quantifiable relationship between firm reputation and employer branding within the banking sector of South Punjab that will influence both recruitment and retention.

H3: Firm reputation has a positive effect on employer brand in the South Punjab banking sector.

Mediation Effect

The mediating role of firm reputation is central to understanding how upstream organizational practices translate into downstream outcomes. Reputation serves as the mediating variable by which the impact of communication strategies on employer branding occurs, because proper communication leads to good stakeholder reputation for the bank (Swift, 2001; Bontis et al., 2007), and then this developed reputation gets used by potential recruits and employees to assess the organization as an employer (Gilani & Cunningham, 2017; Binu et al., 2022). Reputation, thus, is not only an end result, but also an intermediate factor carrying forward the effect of communication into the results of employer branding such as recruitment efficiency, employee retention, and organizational commitment (Bankins & Waterhouse, 2019). In the case of South Punjab banks, where reliability and word-of-mouth communication play major roles in shaping the stakeholder perceptions, the role of this reputational channel connecting communication to employer image will be quite significant, despite the lack of large-scale empirical research available on this subject.

H4: Firm reputation positively mediates the relationship between communication strategies and employer branding in the South Punjab banking sector.

The second mediating variable used in Corporate Social Responsibility is developed through a parallel process. Financial literacy programs, community development activities, and inclusive financing are examples of CSR actions that send out signals of good intentions to internal as well as external stakeholders (Deigh et al., 2016). The accumulation of all those signals leads to building the reputation of the organization as being trustworthy and reliable (Su et al., 2014; Dell'Atti et al., 2017). The latter, in turn, becomes the reputational capital which the job seekers use to evaluate the attractiveness of the company (Binu et al., 2022). According to Dickson et al. (2014), there is a very high correlation ($r=.77$) between reputation and attraction of the potential employer, while, according to Sivertzen et al. (2013), the same link can be made between reputation building activities and the results achieved in terms of employer branding. For banks operating in South Punjab, the reputational route of CSR to employer branding is going to play a particularly crucial role (Khan et al., 2024).

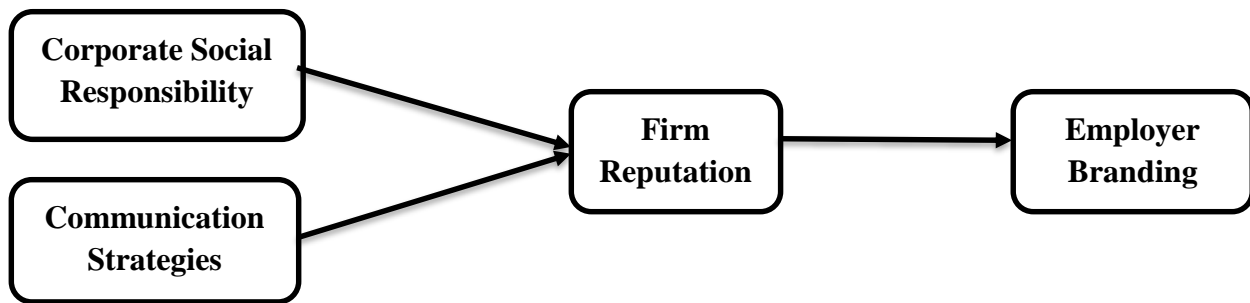
H5: Firm reputation positively mediates the relationship between corporate social responsibility and employer branding in the South Punjab banking sector.

The Signaling Theory (Spence, 1973) forms the basis of this research as it enables organizations to signal their values via visible means. As such, the organization reduces information asymmetry between that organization and external stakeholders. In the context of this research, employees or potential employees in the banking sector in South Punjab are rarely aware of internal values, practices or working conditions within these organizations, therefore they will rely on visible organizational signals to assess banks and determine if they regard the bank as a good place to work (nice, trustworthy/credible) or poor (not nice, untrustworthy/unreliable) based on how they perceive the bank's visible communication. This process will be assisted by the use of various signaling instruments in the model (communication strategy, corporate social responsibility (CSR), etc.) and through effective communication, signaling instruments will build stakeholder

trust in banks (via timely, consistent and clear communication) and provide a way for stakeholders to accurately navigate their assessment(s) of the bank's qualities.

Likewise, CSR initiatives also have high external signaling impacts of behaving ethically and having social responsibility. Bank initiated many programs like community development programmers, financial inclusion initiatives, educational help and welfare projects are all a true testament to the efforts of the bank towards social responsibility. Such behaviors are even more impactful in South Punjab province where the community style is really prominent and thus helps immensely with both stakeholder trust and raising organizational attractiveness. Overall, communication strategies and CSR jointly influence firm reputation which is the long term evaluation of the bank. The image of the bank improves if ethical practices and open communication consistently send positive signals. Reputation is one of the key resources for this business, especially in the banking industry where trust and reliability are the most important factors. Finally, but not the least important, reputation is yet another factor that motivates employer branding. Good reputation is an advertisement to future employees showing that the company can offer them good prospects, stability at work, ethics and good working atmosphere. Therefore, communication strategies and CSR are connected with the reputation of the company and thus support employer branding in the banking industry of South Punjab.

Conceptual Framework



3. Research Methodology

The research used quantitative and cross-sectional research design to explore the linkages between communication strategy, corporate social responsibility (CSR), firm reputation, and employer branding in the banking industry. Quantitative design was chosen since this research design provides a scientific way of measuring variables and testing hypotheses about their linkages. Bank employees constituted the units of analysis for the present research. The data collection was carried out through a structured questionnaire that had close-ended questions. All the measurement scales used had been adopted from other previous researches and were measured using a five-point Likert scale (1=Strongly disagree, 5=Strongly agree). The variables Communication Strategy, Corporate Social Responsibility, Firm Reputation, and Employer Branding were measured using six items adopted from Cameron & Quinn (1999), eight items adopted from Turker (2009), eight items adopted from Walsh & Beatty (2007) and Employer Attractiveness Scale respectively developed by Berthon, Ewing & Hah (2005).

Sampling through a random process was adopted in order to give each individual from the target group an equal chance of being selected. There were a total of 181 questionnaires received, where 172 were considered appropriate for the analysis and only 9 were found to be inappropriate. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS and SmartPLS. SPSS was used to generate descriptive statistics and analyze respondents' demographic characteristics. SmartPLS was used to perform

Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), including assessment of the measurement model (reliability and validity) and the structural model to test the hypothesized relationships among the study variables.

Analysis and findings:

Table 1: *Demographic characteristics*

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	112	59.9%
	Female	75	40.1%
Age	18–25 years	104	55.6%
	26–35 years	35	18.7%
	36–45 years	26	13.9%
	46–55 years	16	8.6%
	56+ Above	6	3.2%
Marital Status	Single	111	59.4%
	Married	67	35.8%
	Divorced	4	2.1%
	Widow	5	2.7%
Educational Qualification	Intermediate	36	19.3%
	Bachelor’s Degree	89	47.6%
	MPhil/MS	46	24.6%
	PhD	16	8.6%
Type of Bank	Public	55	29.4%
	Private	132	70.6%
Banking Experience	Less than 1 year	66	35.3%
	1–3 years	47	25.1%
	4–6 years	32	17.1%
	7–10 years	18	9.6%
	10+ years	24	12.8%
Tenure in Current Bank	Less than 1 year	75	40.1%
	1–3 years	46	24.6%
	4–6 years	28	15.0%
	7–10 years	17	9.1%
	10+ years	21	11.2%

Data Review and Initial Assessment

The first step of measurement attenuation (that is, across studies based on data collected from organizations in the financial services industry and their environment) is to screen data as a critical element of precision, reliability and errors. The SPSS was used to examine if there were any missing values or outliers in the dataset and to determine if the dataset was normally distributed (of which the results can be found in the work of Sharifnia, 2026). Any missing values were imputed using the mean, or deleted from the dataset, based on the type of missing values and the overall magnitude of missing values. After the data cleaning process, measures of central tendency were derived to allow for the examination of demographic variables such as respondents' gender, age, status, education and banking experience and time served at current institution. This information provides a basic idea of what is representative of the sample and establishes the validity and accuracy of the dataset on which further analysis (e.g., reliability testing, validity testing, structural equation modelling) can be based.

PLS-SEM Model

For the results of research, especially those with a high level of data processing in organizations of the banking sector, specialized software tools will be required to facilitate data analysis and interpretation. As pointed out by Mathews, Hair and Mathews (2018), these tools allow researchers to verify more accurately the intricate relationships among variables. Among them, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) stands out because of its flexibility, a user-friendly graphical interface and the capability to analyze complex models without large sample sizes (Hair et al., 2011). PLS-SEM is particularly suitable for exploratory and predictive research, where the main aim is maximizing variance explained on the outcome variables of substantive interest, and provide managerial guidance decision making in banking sector.

PLS-SEM has two main components: measurement and structural model. While the measurement model is used to assess scale reliability and validity of the constructs with respect to the observed indicators, in contrast, for estimating model path coefficients that measure hypothetical relationships between constructs we use structural model. Before one can turn to the structural model (in mediation/ moderation), you must first it analyze the measurement model. (Hair et al., 2016) The testing of the significance of relationship between hypotheses and theoretical framework proposed in this is by structural model to validate the theoretical model (Lowry & Gaskin, 2014). This two-stage methodology not only offers stable measurement but also robust evaluation of associations, which is why it would be the most appropriate method of exploring complex problems in the banking sector organizations.

Measurement Model and Factor Loading Review

According to Hair et al. (2014) discusses that measurement model assessment is a key step in the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), and it provides the basis to ensure construct reliability and validity for structural model evaluation. The measurement model was evaluated for CSR, CS, FR and EB in the current research. Factor loadings for item reliability were specified along with establishing acceptable variables of above.70. As a result, all of the factor loadings were between 0.724-0.901 indicating acceptable level of indicator reliability and further evidence that their items represented their respective constructs satisfactorily.

Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) were employed to assess internal consistency reliability. As recommended by Hair et al. (2014) "Cronbach's Alpha (α) and Composite Reliability values of above 0.70 indicate good internal consistency and reliability". The results indicated that

all the items measuring CSR ($\alpha = 0.941$, CR = 0.951), Communication Strategies ($\alpha = 0.931$, CR = 0.943), Firm Reputation ($\alpha = 0.936$, CR = 0.949) and Employer Branding ($\alpha = 0.916$, CR = 0.933) showed good internal consistency reliability are above values set as threshold at which the exists an acceptable level of reflects lack of internal assumptions); and this is shown through Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability Coefficients respectively for individual scale sub-scales

In order to confirm the convergent validity of the constructs, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were examined, where an AVE value greater than 0.50 was considered acceptable [48]. The AVE values for each of the examined constructs of CSR (0.707); Communication Strategies (0.676); Firm Reputation (0.757) and Employer Branding (0.666) were all determined to exceed the threshold of 0.500, supporting their respective convergent validities [29]. Similarly, the respective Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values for the constructs ranged from 1.891 to 4.090 which are all substantially less than the accepted critical VIF value of <5 suggesting the constructs weren't multicollinear; therefore, the measurement model satisfied the established reliability and validity requirements for use in further analysis of the relationship between CSR, Communication Strategies, Firm Reputation, and Employer Branding as represented by the measurement model.

Table 2:

Variable	Items	VIF	Cross Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Composite Reliability	AVE
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)	CSR1			0.941	0.941	0.951	0.707
		2.609	0.813				
	CSR2	3.521	0.847				
	CSR3	3.688	0.851				
	CSR4	2.642	0.837				
	CSR5	3.599	0.884				
	CSR6	3.061	0.829				
	CSR7	3.106	0.842				
Communication Strategies (CS)	CSR8	2.729	0.819				
	CS1			0.931	0.936	0.943	0.676
		2.095	0.724				
	CS2	2.537	0.795				
	CS3	2.760	0.814				
	CS4	2.933	0.851				

	CS5	4.090	0.890				
	CS6	3.063	0.852				
	CS7	2.998	0.817				
	CS8	2.980	0.826				
Firm Reputation (FR)	FR1			0.936	0.936	0.949	0.757
		3.667	0.844				
	FR2	4.082	0.867				
	FR3	3.855	0.901				
	FR4	3.218	0.868				
	FR5	3.593	0.863				
	FR6	3.384	0.874				
Employer Branding (EB)	EB1			0.916	0.917	0.933	0.666
		2.217	0.812				
	EB2	2.917	0.821				
	EB3	2.961	0.823				
	EB4	2.468	0.815				
	EB5	3.129	0.849				
	EB6	2.803	0.840				
	EB7	1.891	0.750				

Fornell-Larcker Criterion

The current study was performed within the banking sector employing the Fornell–Larcker criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) to help us assess discriminant validity. This criterion ensures that all the constructs of the proposed framework — Corporate Social Responsibility, Communication Strategies, Firm Reputation and Employer Branding are empirical distinctiveness and measured accurately. To establish discriminant validity, the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct was compared with all inter-construct correlations as shown by the correlation matrix off-diagonal elements and diagonal.

As illustrated in table 1 below, the diagonal values of all constructs were greater than inter-construct correlations (the correlation between two different constructs), suggesting that each construct has enough discriminant validity from the others [44]. These results validated a medium

size of discriminant validity, thus ensuring the reliability and robustness of the measurement model from the point of view as per banking sector. Thus, the selected variables: Corporate Social Responsibility, Communication Strategies, Firm Reputation and Employer Branding are theoretically and empirically not coupled constructs in this framework which has been proposed by this paper.

Table 3:

Construct	CS	CSR	EB	FR
CS	0.822			
CSR	0.837	0.841		
EB	0.670	0.627	0.816	
FR	0.807	0.719	0.819	0.870

Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT)

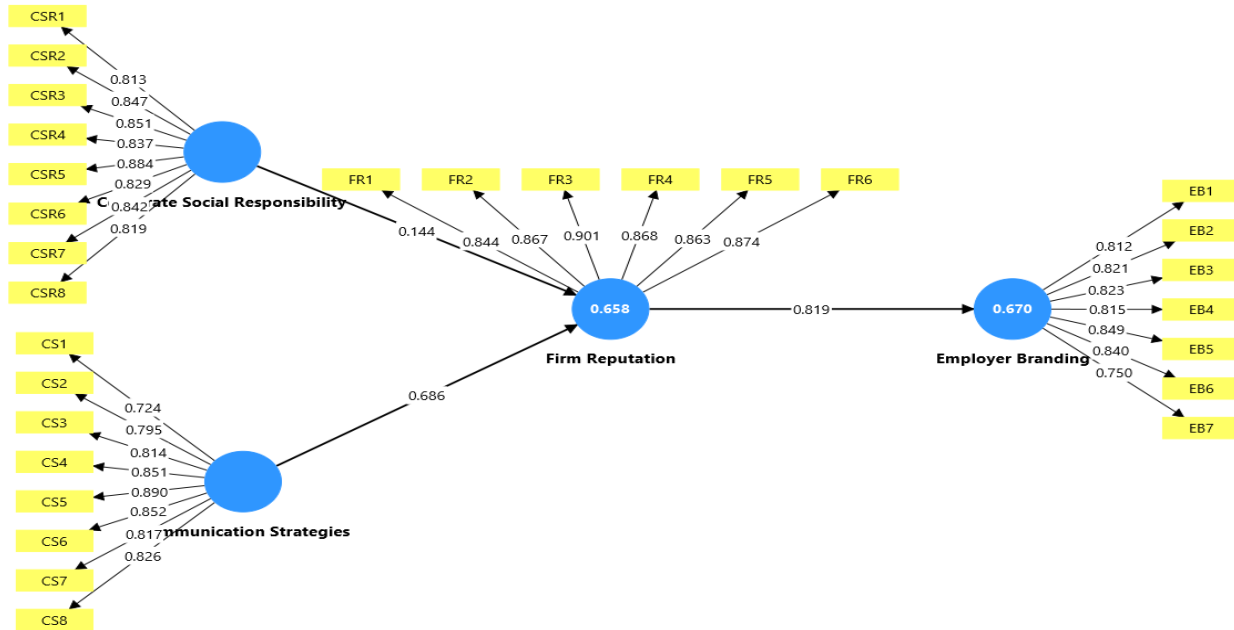
Besides the Fornell–Larcker criterion, the Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations was applied to evaluate discriminant validity for constructs contained in a proposed framework. According to Henseler et al. (2015), HTMT is basically used, being a more reliable and sensitive procedure for assessing discriminant validity problems versus traditional techniques as it identifies overlap between constructs. HTMT, which is the ratio of between-construct correlations to within-construct correlations and as such higher values signal potential problems in terms of discriminant validity. In general, a threshold of 0.90 is acceptable, while in incisive research studies, the more penitent criterion of 0.85 may be applied.

In this study of Structural Equation Models (SEM), which investigates the interrelations between Corporate Social Responsibility, Communication Strategies, Firm Reputation and Employer Branding, all HTMT values remain below acceptable 0.90. This result provides evidence that each construct is empirically different from one another, and thus shows adequate discriminant validity. Moreover, these results also correspond with the findings from Fornell–Larcker criterion assessment, and thus further confirms the measurement model validity. Thus, CSD, COMS, FR and EB are shown to have sufficient discriminant validity in the prescribed theoretical model.

Table 4:

Construct	CS	CSR	EB	FR
CS				
CSR	0.700			
EB	0.721	0.675		
FR	0.758	0.765	0.782	0.758

Figure 1



Evaluation of structural model

The structural model was evaluated with respect to the significance and strength of the hypothesized relationships via path coefficients, t-statistics, p-values and confidence intervals. Results show that all direct relations are significant ($p < 0.001$) at the conventional cutoff for this assignment, providing validation of the proposed research framework. In particular, the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) positively affects Firm Reputation (FR) ($\beta = 0.144$), meaning that implementing socially responsible practices in a firm ensures the firm reputation in more positive manner. Similarly, Communication Strategies (CS) has a high positive impact on Firm Reputation with $\beta = 0.686$ which signifies that well communicated, effective communication strategies can have a significant impact on the organizational reputation

Moreover, Firm Reputation substantially affects Employer Branding (EB) ($\beta = 0.819$), which indicates firms with a strong and positive reputation are able to build a better employer brand image in the market. The coefficients of determination (R^2) indicate also a considerable explanatory power of the model: Firm Reputation explains 67.0% and Employer Branding explains 65.8% of variance respectively. All the measures for reliability are greater than .70 revealing the indicators have an acceptable level of reliability (as reported by Factor Loading). The CSR measure factor loadings are .813 to .884, Communication Strategies measure factor loadings are .724 to .890, Firm Reputation measure factor loadings are .844 to .901, and the measure for the Employer Branding is .750 to .849 giving strong convergent validity of all the constructs. [37]

The results of the structural model as a whole show that all the hypothesized relationships were supported and the model has good predictive power due to the fact that none of the confidence intervals included zero in either of the two path estimates, which add to the robustness of the

model. Therefore, the CSR and Communication Strategies were shown to positively influence the Firm's Reputation and the Firm's Reputation positively influenced the Firm's Employer Brand.

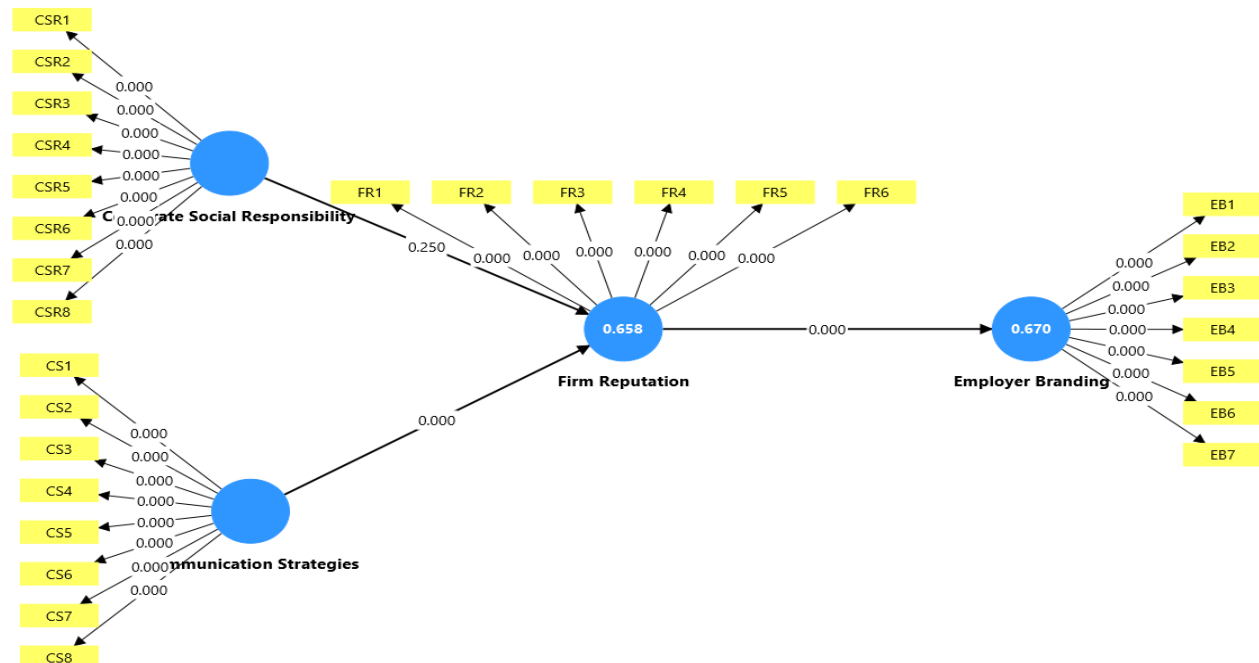
R-Square (R²) Values

Last, the coefficient of determination (R²), which is also a commonly used metric in Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), indicates how much variance in the dependent variables can be explained by the independent variables. According to Hair Et al. R² values are used to make judgements regarding the predictive accuracy of structural models (Henseler et al.2010) and R² values of 0.67, 0.33 and 0.19 would be considered substantial, moderate and weak (Chin1998). In this study, Corporate Social Responsibility and Communication Strategies were conceptualized as exogenous variables while Firm Reputation and Employer Branding were treated as endogenous variables respectively. The structural model estimates were tabulated according to R² and adjusted R² values in Table.

Variables	R-Square (R ²)	R ² Adjusted
Firm Reputation	0.670	0.669
Employer Branding	0.658	0.655

The results suggest the model provides good explanation power. As shown in the following table, Firm Reputation is explained at a joint level by Corporate Social Responsibility and Communication Strategies with an R² value of 0.670 (or 67.0% variance). Likewise, the R² = 0.658 shows that Firm Reputation can explain 65.8% of the variance in Employer Branding. The findings indicate that the framework has a relatively high predictive power, indicating that CSR activities and communication efforts may have a significant impact on cementing firm reputation followed by improving employer branding in the banking domain.

Figure 2



Discussion

This research has examined the effect of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Communication Strategies (CS) on Employer Branding (EB) where Firm Reputation (FR) acted as a mediator in the context of banking industry. These findings have provided sufficient empirical support to the research model where the importance of CSR and communication strategies have been identified as means through which organizations can build up their firm reputation and in return enhance employer branding. In other words, the employees evaluate the organization based on both the quality of employment practices within the organization and the social responsibility and communication efforts of the organization.

It can be seen from the findings that the first hypothesis has been supported in the way that Corporate Social Responsibility positively influences the reputation of the firm. Thus, people perceive socially responsible organizations as ethical and honest and as those firms that take care of society. According to the stakeholder theory, socially responsible organizations build up stakeholder trust and legitimacy. The findings are similar to previous studies that found out that Corporate Social Responsibility is an essential variable in firm reputation (Turban & Greening, 1997; Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Binu, 2022). For banks, CSR practices like financial literacy programs, scholarship programs, environmental sustainability, and community development serve as evidence of organizational responsibility.

Moreover, the results have confirmed the second hypothesis which implies that Communication Strategies improve Firm Reputation significantly. Effective communication makes it possible for companies to communicate their values, strategies and commitment towards stakeholders. In terms of Signaling Theory, communication is viewed as an important signal that allows firms to minimize uncertainty, demonstrate credibility, integrity and reliability. Open communication increases employees' trust, reduces ambiguity and improves the perception of organizational professionalism. This finding is supported by the existing studies which confirm that companies possessing transparency and authenticity in their communication create better reputations and win more confidence among stakeholders. For banks where public trust is the key competitive advantage, the importance of effective communication cannot be overestimated.

In addition, these results are also supportive of the third hypothesis that shows a positive effect of Firm Reputation on Employer Branding. Organizational reputation is seen as an attractive factor for organizations because reputation is the measure of quality, stability, ethics, and future career prospects in organization. These results support the employer branding model put forward by Backhaus & Tikoo (2004) who have stressed that good organizational reputation increases the appeal of organization to potential employees. According to Turban & Greening (1997), job applicants would consider joining organizations that have good reputation because of the better working environment and career prospects at such firms. Thus, organizational reputation acts as a strategic asset in the competitive banking industry.

One of the most important outcomes of this research has been the demonstration of the mediational role of Firm Reputation in the associations of CSR, Communication Strategies, and Employer Branding. The results show that CSR and Communication do not affect Employer Branding independently but that these practices work mostly through the creation of a good organizational reputation. These results contribute to the validation of Signaling Theory, as socially responsible activities and communication become the positive signals of an organization that shape the stakeholder perceptions prior to affecting employer attractiveness. In other words, the employees perceive socially responsible activities and communications as signals of organizational values,

and, based on this perception, they create a positive firm reputation, which helps to increase employer attractiveness.

This study is also valuable for the employer branding literature because it provides an explanation for CSR, communication, and firm reputation in the same framework within the scope of the banking sector. Even though previous research has mostly focused on these concepts separately, this study shows how responsible actions of an organization together with effective communication can enhance employer branding by means of creating a good corporate reputation. Thus, it broadens the scope of employer branding literature in the sense that reputation is a strategic intangible resource.

In terms of managing, the above research findings indicate that companies interested in improving the employer brand image need to go beyond traditional recruitment campaigns. The management needs to focus on implementing CSR practices, ethical behavior within the organization, and communicating effectively about organizational values. This will help develop a good reputation of the company, which not only attracts good employees but also improves engagement and organizational commitment. Thus, for banking organizations in today's competitive labor market environment, organizational reputation should be seen as a key issue of gaining competitive advantage.

In general, this research proves that the concept of employer branding relies not on individual initiatives in human resource management but on general approaches adopted within the organization. CSR and communications have a positive impact on the company's reputation, which in turn contributes to employer branding. This means that responsible management, communication, and reputation management are crucial strategic competencies.

Conclusion

The current research deals with the use of Corporate Social Responsibility as a communication strategy for improving the corporate reputation of a bank and constructing the employer brand of the organization. It was found out that both Corporate Social Responsibility and the Communication Strategy have a direct and significant influence on creating the corporate reputation of a bank, whereas the corporate reputation of the bank influences directly on creating the employer brand of the bank. Moreover, it is proven in the research that organizations which focus on the development of their Corporate Social Responsibility Strategy and implement efficient communication strategies will have more chances to create a good reputation as a workplace and eventually to create an employer brand. Therefore, corporate reputation of a bank acts as a connection between different CSR and Communication Strategies implemented by the bank and the results of developing the employer brand of the bank. Ethical business conduct and corporate social responsibility, as well as contribution into development of their communities, transparency and communication about the activities of banks will provide these organizations with more chances for gaining employee loyalty, creating good organizational image and attracting talents.

Additionally, the results indicate that the development of an employer brand occurs not only through recruitment efforts, but as well as from employee and stakeholder assessments of the degree of the organization's integrity or independence (bounded rationality), and consequently develop accordingly. Based on this study, banking-related entities should allocate resources toward possible corporate social responsibility actions and toward developing transparent communications that describe their CSR activities. In order to gain visibility and increase their

position in the labor market, banking-related entities should make investments into potential CSR initiatives and develop transparent communication strategies regarding their CSR initiatives. Organizations with strong reputations will have more attractive, engaged, and retained employees over time, thus supporting their long-term success and sustainability.

Overall, this research provides empirical evidence to add to the literature supporting the relationships between CSR, communication strategies, firm reputation, and employer branding among the bank sector. The findings may be utilized by researchers and practitioners to understand how bank-related entities can enhance employer brand outcomes by making organizational practices that build their reputations.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The research serves as a first ever comprehensive critique of the literature involving the variables underlying the corporate social responsibility (CSR) and communication strategies with respect to their effects on corporate reputation and employer branding of the company being studied. It confirms that CSR and effective communication efforts influence the creation of an organizational reputation ultimately leading to the establishment of an employer brand for the organization. The research further contributes to the development of theory by demonstrating that organizational reputation is the primary mechanism through which the organizational practices of a firm will influence employee perceptions of and referrals to the organization. In a practical sense, such findings would mean that organizations, especially in the public sector, need to embrace the concept of CSR and ensure there is efficient communication for improving the reputation of the organization. For instance, if organizations engage in frequent communication regarding CSR successes and practice transparency both internally and externally, then they are bound to create good reputations among the workers and job seekers. This will make an organization more attractive and thereby improve employer branding.

Future Directions

Future research should use longitudinal designs to examine how CSR and communication strategies influence company reputation and employer branding over time. Studies should also investigate reputation as both a mediator and moderator, while considering factors such as employee engagement, organizational trust, and leadership style. To improve generalizability, the proposed model should be tested across different industries and cultural contexts, with national and cultural differences examined as moderating variables. Additionally, mixed-methods approaches combining surveys with interviews or case studies could provide deeper insights. Finally, future studies should explore the growing role of digital communication and social media in shaping organizational reputation and employer branding.

Conflict of Interest

The authors showed no conflict of interest.

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