

The Ripple Effect of CSR: Linking CSR to Employee Engagement via Well-Being and organizational Image

Bibi Fatima¹, Dr. Jamal Abdul Nasir Ansari², Dr. Bilal Ashgar³, Ariba Fatima⁴

¹ Research Scholar, Department of Commerce, Integral University, Lucknow 226026, Uttar Pradesh, India.
Email: syedfatima7273@gmail.com

² Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce, Integral University, Lucknow 226026, Uttar Pradesh, India.

Email: jnasir4@gmail.com

³ Assistant Professor, Department of Business Administration, Al Fayha Private College, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Email: dr.bilal@fayha.edu.sa

⁴ Research Scholar, Department of Commerce, Integral University, Lucknow 226026, Uttar Pradesh, India.
Email: aribaf010@gmail.com

Corresponding Author:

Dr. Jamal Abdul Nasir Ansari

Email: jnasir4@gmail.com

Abstract

The aim of this study was to dictate how employees' perceptions of corporate social responsibility affect their level of job engagement. In Central, it poses a straightforward but critical question like Do employees become more committed to their work when they think their company is doing good in the world If so, why, in order to investigate this, the researchers polled 239 experts from both public and private sector organizations in the industrial and service sectors. A snowball sampling technique, in which one participant leads to the next, was used to reach participants through a combination of in-person meetings and online platforms. Structural Equation Modeling, a technique ideal for interpreting complicated correlations between variables, was subsequently utilized to analyze the data. CSR enhances employee engagement both directly and indirectly through work-life balance and organizational identification, highlighting its strategic role in fostering supportive environments, strengthening employee–organization bonds, and improving overall engagement..

Keywords Employee Engagement, Well-Beings, Corporate Social Responsibility, Organizational Image..

Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility, or CSR, has come to mean something quite specific in business literature the recognition that companies operate within a society, not apart from it, and that financial success and social responsibility are not opposing forces but complementary ones (Davis, 1973). What began as a relatively niche concern has gradually pulled in a much wider audience governments, civil society organisations, and journalists among them suggesting that questions about what businesses owe to the world have moved well into the mainstream (Kerr et al., 2008). One of the more interesting findings to emerge from this body of research is how deeply CSR affects people on the inside of organisations. Workers who believe their employer is genuinely contributing to something larger than profit tend to feel better about their jobs and that feeling matters in practical terms, not just moral ones (Tsourvakas & Yfantidou, 2018). The literature on this is fairly broad, spanning reputation, stakeholder dynamics, and workplace attitudes, and the cumulative picture is hard to ignore. CSR has become deeply embedded in how organisations function and how people experience them (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). The practices involved range from environmental commitments to community investment to ethical governance different in form but united by a shared attempt to make corporate behaviour more responsive to what society actually needs (Carroll, 1991). Employee engagement, understood as the presence of energy, commitment, and real absorption in one's work (Schaufeli et al., 2002), is widely regarded as critical to organisational effectiveness, and CSR appears to feed directly into it. A sense that one's organisation is doing meaningful work seems to foster pride, strengthen identification with the employer, and contribute to employees' broader well-being (Bauman & Skitka, 2012; Turker, 2008). The implication is fairly straightforward on how a company is seen in the world shapes how its people feel within it, and those feelings carry real consequences for how they work (Kim et al., 2010).

Despite the growing body of evidence, a number of questions remain unresolved. Much of what we know about CSR concerns its effects on external stakeholders, customers, investors, communities while its influence on employees, arguably the group most directly shaped by organisational decisions, has received comparatively less attention. Beyond that, the mechanisms linking CSR to outcomes like engagement are not particularly well understood. Constructs such as organisational image and employee well-being are frequently invoked but rarely examined in a way that traces how precisely they carry the effect of CSR through to individual attitudes and behaviours. There is also a more fundamental contextual limitation. The existing literature is heavily weighted toward Western organisational settings, which leaves open the question of whether these dynamics hold in contexts with different cultural logics, institutional arrangements, and industrial histories India being a notable example of a setting that remains underrepresented (De Roeck & Maon, 2018). These are not merely theoretical gaps. A clearer account of how and why CSR shapes employee engagement, across different contexts, would have direct implications for how organisations design and communicate their social responsibility efforts.

Review of Literature and Hypothesis Development

CSR has shifted considerably in how researchers and practitioners understand it. The earlier framing which treated it largely as a reputational instrument has given way to a more substantive view one that takes seriously its potential effects on the people who work within organisations. A consistent finding has begun to emerge from recent empirical work when employees perceive their organisation as genuinely committed to social responsibility that perception registers in how they feel about their work, how engaged they are and how their broader well-being holds up over time. Zhang et al. (2023) provide a useful illustration of this pattern finding that CSR initiatives appear to give employees a stronger sense of purpose and belonging and that this in turn is associated with reduced burnout and better overall well-being. Social identity theory helps make sense of this. People tend to define themselves partly through the organisations they belong to and when that organisation is seen as doing something worthwhile in the world being a part of it carries a certain meaning one that employees do not simply observe but genuinely internalise (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). This is not a new observation. Glavas and Piderit (2009) showed that CSR practices directed at employees fair treatment involvement in community work were linked to better emotional states and more positive work attitudes. Stakeholder theory speaks to the same issue from a different angle. Freeman (1984) argued that employees are central stakeholders not peripheral ones and that organizations carry a genuine obligation toward them. When that obligation is taken seriously, employees tend to respond in kind. The conservation of resources theory adds a more psychological dimension. Hobfoll (1989) proposed that people work to build and protect the resources that allow them to cope and function and CSR can be read through this lens as one such resource something that reduces the psychological costs of work and supports well being over time. What these perspectives share is the view that the CSR well-being relationship is not accidental. It has theoretical grounding across multiple frameworks and empirical support stretching back decades which makes it a reasonably firm foundation to build on.

H1: CSR activities significantly influence employee well-being.

CSR research has gradually moved beyond questions of external perception toward something more immediate how employees actually experience their work when they believe their organisation is behaving responsibly. Glavas and Kelley (2014) found that this belief tends to give employees a stronger sense of meaning and a feeling that their personal values are not at odds with where they work. Kim et al. (2017) found similar patterns with CSR perceptions associating with higher job satisfaction and lower reported stress. That said these findings come with a caveat that runs through much of this literature. Employees are not passive recipients of CSR messaging they assess it. Rupp et al. (2013) found that when CSR is perceived as largely symbolic or motivated by image concerns rather than genuine values the expected benefits tend to weaken or disappear altogether. De Roeck and Maon (2018) make a related point like CSR that is woven into how an organisation actually operates rather than treated as a separate initiative is what tends to produce sustained effects on how employees feel about their work and their place within it. Authenticity in other words, is not a minor detail it appears to be a condition for the relationship to hold.

H2: Employee well-being significantly influences employee engagement.

Well-being is not a single construct. It spans physical health, psychological state, and the quality of workplace relationships and research suggests each of these plays some role in how employees relate to their work (Danna & Griffin, 1999). Kahn (1990) observed that employees who feel well tend to invest more of themselves in their roles and are less prone to burnout a finding that has held up reasonably well across subsequent research. The Job Demands-Resources model helps explain why Bakker and Demerouti (2007) proposed that engagement emerges when the resources available to employees are adequate relative to the demands they face and well-being functions as one of those resources. Support from the organisation whether practical, relational, or simply in the form of being acknowledged seems to matter for sustaining both (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018).

H3: CSR activities significantly influence employee engagement.

A recurring finding in this area is that value congruence the sense that one's personal values are reflected in what the organisation does is associated with stronger motivation and engagement (Kim et al., 2017). Glavas (2016) found that employees who view their organisation as socially responsible report not only higher satisfaction but also a greater tendency to go beyond what their role formally requires. The distinction between CSR that employees actually experience versus CSR that is largely communicated appears relevant here. Aguinis and Glavas (2012) suggest that when social responsibility is embedded in day to day organisational practice rather than treated as a separate programme the resulting engagement is more durable and less dependent on external prompting.

H4: CSR activities significantly influence organisational image.

Organisations build reputations gradually and CSR is one of the inputs that shapes how they come to be perceived. Brown and Dacin (1997) found that a credible record of social responsibility is associated with greater perceived trustworthiness among external audiences. McWilliams and Siegel (2001) found related effects on brand perception and stakeholder relationships and noted that CSR can serve as a differentiating factor in competitive markets. The reputational benefits however, do not appear to be automatic. The literature fairly consistently points to perceived authenticity as a moderating condition organisations that are seen as genuinely committed to their stated values tend to realise stronger image effects than those whose CSR is viewed as primarily strategic (De Roeck & Maon, 2018).

H5: Organisational image significantly influences employee engagement.

How employees perceive their organisation externally has consequences for how they relate to it internally. Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail (1994) found that a strong organisational image tends to foster pride among employees and that this pride is associated with greater commitment and investment in work. This connects to a broader point in the identity literature as people care about the reputation of the groups they belong to and employees whose organisation is seen as ethical and well-regarded tend to show higher engagement as a result (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Glavas and Godwin (2013) found that organisations grounding their identity in genuine values do not just benefit externally employees in such organisations report feeling more purposeful and motivated in their day to day work. Taken together the relationships examined here suggest that CSR does not act on engagement in isolation. Its effects appear to work through intervening conditions specifically how employees feel and how they perceive their organisation's standing and it is through these pathways that the broader influence of CSR on engagement becomes visible.

Methodology

The study focused on middle-level employees drawn from a range of business organisations across India covering both public and private sector workplaces. Industries represented included manufacturing, oil and gas and information technology. This cross industry sampling was intentional as drawing from a single sector would have limited how far the findings could be generalised (Langelaan et al., 2006). Of the 303 executives approached 239 returned complete and usable responses giving a response rate of around 78.88%. Data collection combined self administered questionnaires distributed during in person visits with an online snowball sampling approach which helped extend the reach of the study across different locations and organisational settings. The overall design used was cross sectional and correlational which suited to examining how variables relate to one another at a particular point of time. recording of responses was done on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Measures

Corporate Social Responsibility Perceptions of CSR was measured using a validated 10-item scale predicted in the stakeholder approach which outlines organisational responsibility as extending beyond shareholders to encompass broader social obligations. The scale covers economic, social and environmental dimensions with items addressing tax compliance customer satisfaction and social responsibility more broadly. With Cronbach alpha of 0.924. Employee Engagement was assessed using the scale developed by Soane et al. (2012) which captures cognitive, emotional and behavioural dimensions of how employees connect with their work. The scale has been widely used and is regarded as having good construct coverage. With the Cronbach alpha 0.941. Organisational Image Perceptions of organisational image were measured using a four-item scale developed by Barakat et al. (2016) focused on how employees assess their organization's contributions to the community and environment. with 0.931 Cronbach alpha. Employee well-being was captured through a six-item scale developed by Sharma et al. (2016) designed to reflect physical, psychological and emotional dimensions of how employees experience life at and outside work. with 0.935 Cronbach's alpha. All four scales showed strong internal consistency which supports the reliability of the measurement approach. The use of previously validated instruments also makes it easier to compare these findings with those of related studies.

Table 1 Correction Statistics

<i>Variables</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>EW L</i>	<i>T L</i>	<i>E E</i>	<i>CS R</i>
EW_L	360	4.4049	1.58108	(.934)			
O_I	360	4.0938	1.42197	.634**	(.929)		
E_E	360	4.3628	1.50129	.642**	.708**	(.941)	
CS_R	360	4.4972	1.45246	.526**	.558**	.667**	(.924)

** $p < 0.01$; Diagonal represent the Cronback Alphas for the scale

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and correlation matrix for the study's key variables including means, standard deviations and intercorrelations among Employee Well-being (EWL) Organizational Image (OI) Employee Engagement (EE) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). The diagonal values shows the square roots of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct and a standard check for divergent validity under Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criterion which the data satisfies. Mean scores which moving from 4.09 (OI) to 4.50 (CSR) pointing that respondents held broadly positive views across all measured constructs. Standard deviations ranging from 1.42 (OI) to 1.58 (EWL) point to moderate variability in how participants responded enough to make the relationships between variables meaningful and worth examining. The inter-correlations observed across variables align closely with what theory would predict lending further weight to the study's conceptual framework. Grounded in Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) these patterns suggest that leadership practices play a meaningful role in shaping both employee engagement and employees' awareness of CSR. These findings echo a well-established line of research showing that how leaders lead has a ripple effect on motivation, commitment and how employees relate to their organization's broader mission (Avolio et al., 2004; Lee et al., 2019; Ansari, 2020).

Table 2 Confirmatory factor Analysis (CFA) statistics

<i>Constructs</i>	<i>Statements</i>	<i>Loading</i>	<i>CR</i>	<i>AVE</i>	<i>MSV</i>
Employee well-being (EWL)	How would you assess your overall quality of life?	0.862	0.935	0.783	0.465
	How content are you with your current health status?	0.929			
	How satisfied are you with the quality of your sleep?	0.848			
	How do you feel about your ability to carry out daily tasks?	0.899			
Employee engagement (EE)	My colleagues and I align on similar work values.	0.854	0.942	0.763	0.569
	My work goals are consistent with those of my colleagues.	0.867			
	I share a similar outlook and approach to work as my colleagues.	0.908			
	I have a positive outlook towards my work.	0.872			
	I feel energized and motivated in my work.	0.874			
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)	I trust that my company is actively working to minimize its environmental footprint.	0.893	0.928	0.723	0.424
	I believe my company demonstrates a strong commitment to social responsibility.	0.882			
	I take pride in my company's initiatives toward sustainability.	0.694			
	I feel confident that my company treats both suppliers and consumers with fairness.	0.896			
	The company has well-established values and clear guidelines for conduct.	0.868			
Organizational image (OI)	I feel that this company values and prioritizes the well-being of its employees.	0.897	0.931	0.771	0.569
	This company actively works to enhance the community and protect the environment.	0.868			
	I take pride in sharing with my family and friends that I am employed here.	0.856			

	I trust that this company fairly addresses the needs of suppliers, employees, and shareholders alike.	0.878			
	Individuals of all ages, races, colors, and sexual orientations are treated equitably and respectfully in this company.	0.873			
CMIN/DF = 2.164, GFI = 0.863, TLI = 0.811, CFI = 0.820, IFI = 0.823, RMSEA = 0.09 and RMR = 0.015					

To ensure that the study's measurement model was both sound and credible Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted by using AMOS 26 (Brown, 2015). The confirmatory factor analysis was conducted first to check the factor structure of the constructs and to determine convergent and discriminant validity (Kaushik, 2017). The CMIN/DF value came out at 2.164, which comes under the commonly accepted range and indicates a reasonable balance between model parsimony and fit. Convergent Validity Convergent validity in simple terms asks whether the different items measuring a construct are all genuinely pointing to the same underlying concept. It was assessed using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) a statistic that tells us how much of the variance in a construct is actually explained by its indicators as opposed to measurement error. An AVE above 0.50 is the accepted threshold for concluding that convergent validity is sufficient (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Alongside AVE, Composite Reliability (CR) was calculated to check the internal consistency of each construct, drawing on standardized factor loadings and error variances (Hair et al., 1998). A CR above 0.70 is the recommended benchmark (Cronbach, 1951; Malhotra, 2004; Field, 2011; Coelho et al., 2015) and importantly CR should exceed AVE to confirm that a construct holds together reliably (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). In this study CR values ranged from 0.696 to 0.889 results in support the reliability of the constructs being measured. Discriminant Validity While convergent validity checks that a construct's items hang together discriminant validity asks a different but equally important question like are the constructs actually distinct from one another This is assessed by comparing each construct's AVE against its Maximum Shared Variance (MSV) with other constructs the logic being that if a construct truly captures something unique its AVE should be higher than the variance it shares with any other construct (Henseler et al., 2009; Nasir Ansari & Azhar, 2022). In this study AVE values for all latent variables consistently exceeded their corresponding MSV values providing clear confirmation of adequate discriminant validity across the board.

Measurement Model Fit

The broader fit of the measurement model was evaluated using several standard indices. The obtained values were as follows GFI = 0.863, TLI = 0.811, CFI = 0.820, IFI = 0.823, RMSEA = 0.09, and RMR = 0.015. These figures sit at the lower end of acceptable thresholds for some indices which is worth acknowledging though taken together they do not raise serious concerns about the model's ability to represent the underlying constructs adequately. The RMSEA of 0.09 in particular warrants a brief note values at this level are generally considered marginal rather than poor and given the complexity of the model this was deemed acceptable for the purposes of the analysis (Nasir Ansari & Irfan, 2023; Nasir Ansari et al., 2022; Ansari & Khan, 2020)

Findings

The path coefficients derived from the structural model, illustrated in Figure 1, offer strong empirical support for the relationships proposed in the conceptual framework. Every hypothesized relationship in the model arise as statistically significant a result that speaks to the logical and theoretical base of the overall framework. In terms of explanatory power, the model was impressive, accounting for 65.9% of the variance in employee engagement, 28.1% of the variance in employee well-being and 32.1% of the variance in organisational image. These are meaningful numbers and they shows us that the model is not only statistically significant in narrow terms but genuinely explains a substantial portion of what drives these important workplace outcomes. Perhaps the most striking individual finding was the strength of CSR's influence on employee well-being. With a path coefficient of $\beta = 0.485$ (C.R. = 10.045, S.E. = 0.048, $p < 0.001$) this relationship was both large and highly significant signalling that CSR initiatives are not relevance to employee well-being but central to it. When organizations invest authentically in social responsibility employees appear to experience it as something real and tangible and a more supportive environment a stronger sense of ethical grounding and a workplace that genuinely cares. The high critical ratio and the statistical significance of this finding leave little room for doubt about its robustness. These results resonate with a well established body of literature linking CSR to how employees perceive workplace sustainability, ethical leadership, and their own satisfaction at work and they add an important piece of evidence to that conversation drawn from a diverse Indian organizational context.

Table 3 Hypothesis at glance

S.No.	hypotheses			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Decision?
	EWL	<---	CSR	0.485	0.048	10.04	***	Significant
	OI	<---	CSR	0.443	0.041	10.75	***	Significant

	EE	<---	CSR	0.280	0.049	5.712	***	Significant
	EE	<---	EWL	0.276	0.046	6.046	***	Significant
	EE	<---	OI	0.537	0.059	9.177	***	Significant

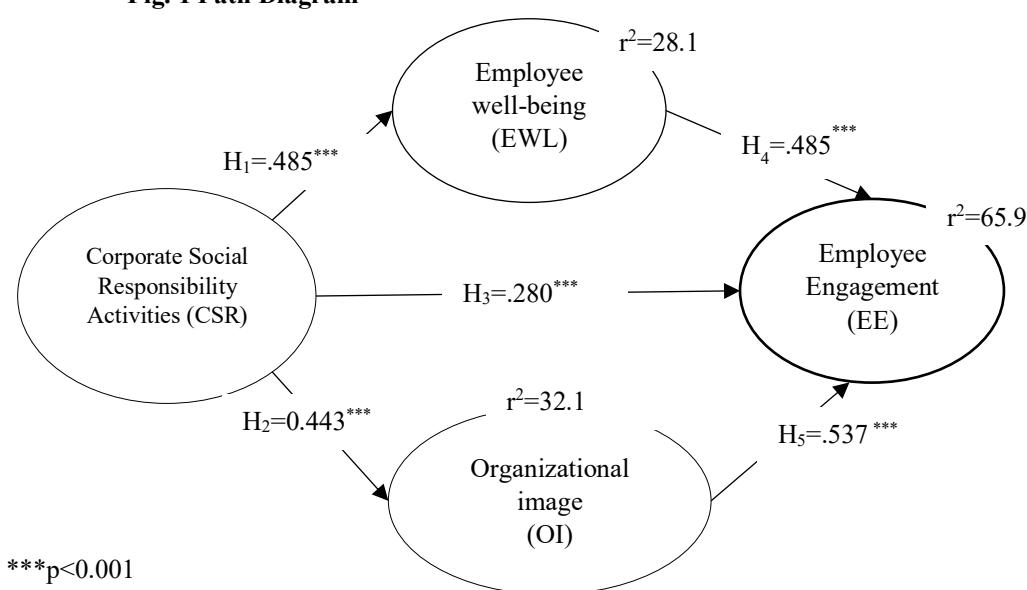
*** $p < 0.001$

The SEM results were largely consistent with what the hypotheses predicted. CSR had a notable consequence on image of the organisation ($\beta = 0.443$, C.R. = 10.755, S.E. = 0.041, $p < 0.001$) and on employee engagement ($\beta = 0.28$, C.R. = 5.712, S.E. = 0.049, $p < 0.001$). Employee well being comparably anticipate engagement ($\beta = 0.276$, C.R. = 6.046, S.E. = 0.046, $p < 0.001$). What distinguished was the way from organisational image to engagement ($\beta = 0.537$, C.R. = 9.177, S.E. = 0.059, $p < 0.001$) which was the largest coefficient in the model. CSR and well-being both had meaningful effects but neither approached the magnitude of this specific relationship. One reading of this is how employees sense of where their organisation stands how it is seen what it is associated with plays a more immediate role in shaping engagement than the direct experience of CSR programmes. Whether that interpretation holds beyond other samples is an open question but it is a finding that seems worth following up on. The variables in this model do not appear to operate independently. The pattern of results points to a chain of influence rather than a set of parallel effects with CSR feeding into both image and well-being each of which in turn relates to how engaged employees are.

Discussion and Conclusion

The model examined here traces the relationships between CSR, employee well-being, organisational image and employee engagement. The basic argument is that an organisation's commitment to social responsibility does not stay at the level of external communication it works its way into how employees feel and how they relate to their work. CSR showed a significant effect on employee well-being ($\beta = 0.485$, $p < 0.001$), accounting for 28.1% of the variance. This is a reasonably substantial proportion and it suggests that employees are not indifferent to whether their organisation takes social responsibility seriously it registers in their psychological experience of work. The effect of CSR on organisational image was similarly meaningful ($\beta = 0.443$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 32.1\%$) which is perhaps unsurprising what an organisation actually does tends to shape how it is perceived including by its own employees. The effects of well-being and image on engagement are where the model's practical relevance becomes clearest. Both were important predictors of well being ($\beta = 0.276$, $p < 0.001$) and organisational image ($\beta = 0.537$, $p < 0.001$) and together they responsible for 65.9% of the variance in engagement. The image engagement path was the strongest in the model which arises an interesting question about whether employees broader perception of their organisation matters more for engagement than their direct experience of specific CSR initiatives. All hypothesised paths were significant at $p < 0.001$. These findings do not just confirm existing theoretical expectations they put some empirical weight behind arguments that CSR has internal consequences that organisations should take seriously particularly those concerned with workforce engagement and retention.

Fig. 1 Path Diagram



Employee well-being and organizational image together account for 65.9% of the variation in employee engagement, according to the R^2 value of 65.9%. Strong empirical evidence for each suggested linkage was also confirmed by the fact that all hypothesised relationships within the structural model were statistically significant at $p < 0.001$. The robustness of the results is further supported by the statistical significance of these routes, which indicates that the likelihood of these correlations happening by chance is less than 0.1%.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

A few limitations are worth being straightforward about. The sample while drawn from multiple industries and sector is confined to Indian organisations. Whether the relationships found here would replicate in other cultural or institutional contexts is not clear and it would be premature to assume they would. CSR norms, employee expectations and organisational cultures vary considerably across settings and future research testing these relationships in different geographies would help establish where the findings generalize and where they do not (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019). The cross-sectional design is a second limitation. It allows for examining associations at one point in time but it does not support causal claims. The relationships found are statistically significant and theoretically grounded but the direction of causality cannot be confirmed from this data alone. Longitudinal designs that traces the same individuals or organisations over time would be better to communicate that question (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Third, the dependancy on self-assessed measures for a concept like engagement and well being enhances the risk of social desirability bias. This is a prevalent limitation in organisational research and does not void the findings but it is worth keeping in mind when clarifying the results. Finally, the study emphasizes on direct effects and does not analyse the range of factors that might condition or carry these relationships. Variables such as leadership quality, perceived organisational support, psychological empowerment and individual values could all plausibly shape how CSR translates into engagement. There is also the question of which aspects of CSR matter most whether environmental initiatives, ethical governance or employee focused programmes for instance have meaningfully different effects on employee outcomes. Disaggregating CSR in this way would add specificity to the findings and could inform more targeted organisational practice (Duarte, 2010). Ethical approval

This research involved human participants. Written informed consent was obtained by all participants before the study.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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