



## WHAT YOUNG INDIA WANTS: STUDYING THE EFFECT OF LEVEL OF CSR ENGAGEMENT ON ORGANIZATIONAL ATTRACTIVENESS

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**ABSTRACT** This study examined the effect of level of engagement in CSR activities on organizational attractiveness as perceived by a young Indian population. A sample of 120 participants between the ages of 18-23 years was assigned to one of three groups, each group containing 40 participants. Participants in each group were sent an online form containing a company profile and a questionnaire that assessed how attractive the participants found the company as potential place to work. The profile sent to each group differed in their descriptions of the company's CSR activities with one profile describing a high level of engagement in CSR, the second describing a low level of engagement and a third with no description of CSR activities. The mean scores on organizational attractiveness given by the three groups to their respective profiles were compared using one-way repeated measures ANOVA and Tukey's HSD Post-hoc test. Findings showed a significant difference in the mean scores of the three profiles, with the High CSR company profile being significantly higher on organizational attractiveness than the Low CSR profile. However, difference in the mean scores of the High CSR profile and the No CSR profile were not significant. Results indicate that engagement in CSR activities influenced respondents' evaluation of the companies and a higher amount of CSR activity was perceived favourably in conditions wherein the profiles mentioned the company's CSR work.

**KEYWORDS :** Corporate-social Responsibility, Organizational Attractiveness, Increasing Talent Pool Of Applicants, Public Relations, Competitive Advantage

### INTRODUCTION

In the age of rapid global climate change, increasing disparities between the wealthy and the poor within as well as among countries, heated debates around gender equality and protective discrimination based on caste, class, race and ethnicity, while the stakes are high on individuals to become aware of these gradients, the private sector continues to thrive and flourish. Under such circumstances, it becomes increasingly relevant for organizations to contribute to the development of citizens in a country, especially in developing nations such as ours. While India has mandated that private organizations engage in Corporate Social Responsibility by an amendment to the Companies Act in 2013 and then 2014, other countries are not far behind. Recently, Burger King in Argentina refused to sell their most profitable item, the Whopper, showing solidarity towards their biggest rival in the market, McDonald's and encouraged customers to visit the latter so that they can help raise more money for children fighting cancer. The news was published across all social media platforms, inviting uproar of acknowledgement and appreciation for either company. However, campaigns of this nature are not always unanimously supported by customers. An example of the same would be the Nike's controversial Colin Kaepernick campaign supporting his national anthem protest against police brutality against the African American community. On the other hand, organizations like Mahindra & Mahindra in India continue to engage extensively in Corporate Social Responsibility, with campaigns like 'Nanhi Kali' (education for the underprivileged girl child). Others like The Neemrana Group have been working to increase the accessibility of periodic health camps, medicines like the IFA, Vitamin A, and the availability of contraceptives at anganwadis since 2015. At a macro level, engagement in CSR may help in generating opportunities for people who may be otherwise deprived of the same, thus improving the quality of the workforce in the country and ultimately enhancing the capabilities of an organisation's employees. However, there are some benefits in the short term too. For instance, studies by the UK Small Business Consortium and Kenexa Research Institute suggest that companies engaging in CSR activities attract more consumers, greater number of job applicants, improve employee engagement and retention. With the youth (15-24 years) constituting 34.33% of the population by the year 2020 in India (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation), it becomes interesting to see whether organisations engaging in CSR are perceived as more attractive.

### Corporate Social Responsibility

Academics and practitioners around the world have been striving to establish an agreed upon definition of this concept for the past 30 years. The Committee for Economic Development, in 1971 came up with a "three concentric circles" approach to understand and represent Corporate Social Responsibility. The inner circle includes basic

economic functions—growth, products, jobs. The intermediate circle holds or prescribes that the economic functions of an organization must be exercised with a sensitive awareness. The outer circle outlines responsibilities that businesses should assume to become more actively involved in improving the social environment. At present, The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) defines CSR as "the commitment of business to contribute to sustainable economic development, working with employees, their families and the local communities" (WBCSD, 2001). In theory, the widely accepted models that explain Corporate Social Responsibility are that of Carroll (1971). Carroll devised a four-part definition of CSR that differentiated between four main types of corporate social responsibilities: economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary.

### Organizational Attractiveness

Previous research literature suggests that the impression an applicant holds about an organization's attractiveness is related to their decision to apply for a job (Turban, 2001). Organizational attractiveness has been conceptualised in many different ways. Some of these definitions include: "Organizational attractiveness refers to the envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organization" (Berthon et al., 2005), or "the degree to which potential and current employees perceive organizations as good places to work" (Jiang and Iles, 2011).

The tool used in this research to measure organizational attractiveness, authored by Highhouse, Lievens, and Sinar (2003), purports that the construct consists of three components: company attraction, intent to pursue, and company prestige. The three components are defined as follows:

"Company attractiveness refers to an individual's affective and attitudinal thoughts about particular a company as potential place for employment.

Intention to pursue refers to thoughts about a company that specifically imply further action. As such, intentions move beyond the passivity of company attractiveness to involve active pursuit of a job.

Social reference is the basis for a company's prestige. A company is prestigious if it inspires thoughts of fame and renown in the minds of those who hear of it."

### The link between CSR and Organizational Attractiveness

An extensive amount of literature strongly supports the link between organizational attractiveness and CSR.

In 2015, Duarte et al. attempted to study the effect of perceived CSR on organizational attractiveness. It was found that perceived level of

engagement in socially responsible practices leads individuals to evaluate an organization as a good place to work. The study concluded that CSR can thus provide competitive advantage in the recruitment of new employees.

Similarly, Ibrahim (2017) studied the relationship between CSR and Employer Attractiveness in Egypt. Findings indicated that there is a strong positive relationship between socially responsible organizations and their attractiveness as employers.

Kim & Park (2011) found a positive relationship between CSR and organizational attractiveness as CSR was concluded as an imperative ethical fit condition for a company. In the present study, the researchers were inspired by Singh et al.'s (2019) study which examined the impact of CSR on organizational attractiveness among young Indian students and found a significant difference between companies engaging in CSR, low or no CSR with the perceived attractiveness differing significantly for the High CSR Company in comparison to the other two. The researchers were therefore interested in examining the following questions:

1. How does information about an organization's level of engagement in CSR activities affect the organization's attractiveness to potential employees?
2. How is an organization with high level of engagement in CSR activities perceived as compared to an organization with relatively lower levels of engagement?
3. How is an organization with no information on CSR perceived as opposed to one with either high or low CSR engagement? And, adding a question not included in Singh et al's (2019) study:
4. In the absence of other company profiles with levels of CSR engagement, how is an organization with either high, low or no CSR engagement perceived with no other profiles for comparison?

Based on the results of previous literature [Singh et al (2015), Duarte et al (2015), Kim and Park (2011), Ibrahim (2017)], it was hypothesized that:

**H1a:** There will be a significant difference in the overall scores of Organizational Attractiveness given by respondents to the three company profiles that differ in levels of CSR engagement.

**H1b:** The scores of Organizational Attractiveness will be significantly higher for the company engaging in high CSR activities as compared to the company with low levels of engagement in CSR

**H1c:** The scores of Organizational Attractiveness given to the company with no mention of CSR will significantly differ from companies whose profiles do.

## METHODOLOGY

### Design

The study used a between-subject experimental design. The aim of the study was to assess the effect of level of engagement in CSR activities on organizational attractiveness as perceived by a young Indian population.

The study was conducted through online platforms for two reasons. Firstly, it is much more convenient for participants to fill out questionnaires online rather than be physically present to participate in the study, thus increasing the reach of the researcher and size of the sample. Secondly, the online design resembles a real-life scenario, where job seekers are likely to read company profiles online while researching about potential places to apply, thus increasing external validity of the research.

The independent variable under study was the level of engagement in CSR activities by the company. The dependent variable was organizational attractiveness as perceived by the respondents, measured through the two components of company attractiveness and intent to apply. The variables controlled for included the field the company works in/type of work the company does, the locations of its offices, the average salary given to employees, the performance of the company in the last few years, the type of CSR activities the two company profiles with CSR descriptions engaged in, and the word count of the three profiles.

### Sample

The present study used a sample of 120 Indian nationals ( $n=120$ ;  $F=64$ ,

$M=57$ ), between the ages of 18-23, with a mean age of 21.42 years. Convenience sampling was used where after gathering a voluntary participant pool, a link to the online form was sent out on social media platforms by the researchers after randomly allocating participants in each group.

Participants were either college-going or had graduated college recently, were proficient in English and belonged to the upper-middle socio-economic strata.

### Measure

Organizational attractiveness was measured using the Organizational Attractiveness Scale (Highhouse, Lievens&Sinar, 2003). The scale consists of 3 parts measuring company attractiveness, intent to pursue and company prestige, with five items each. For the present study, the component of company prestige was not assessed as the company profiles used in the study were of fictional nature. Some examples of items measuring company attractiveness were 'a job at this company is very appealing to me', 'for me, this company would be a good place to work' and examples of items measuring intent to apply were 'I would accept a job offer from this company', 'I would recommend this company to a friend looking for a job.' Responses are obtained on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5. The questionnaire used for the present study has a minimum score of 10 and maximum score of 50. A higher score indicates higher organizational attractiveness. This measure is reported to have internal consistency reliability of  $\alpha=0.82$ .

### Procedure

A review of literature was done before the study was designed. The company profiles used in the present study were prepared based on the guidelines and samples given in the studies of Kim and Park (2011).

Three fictional profiles describing hypothetical corporations were created based on real companies' information. The type of company was Information and Technology companies, and the name of the company was made up. This type of company was chosen because an IT company was selected as the best place to work in the 100 Best Companies to Work for 2018 list, and so it was assumed that people would pay more attention to this kind of company. All profiles started with general information about the company (e.g., its history and business condition) and this was followed by a description of its CSR activities.

The profiles differed in their level of engagement in CSR activities with one company profile describing a high level of engagement (High CSR condition), one profile describing a low level of engagement (Low CSR condition), and the third having no mention of CSR activity at all (No CSR condition). CSR was described in the profiles using examples of community involvement and charitable giving. Level of engagement in CSR activities was determined by the percentage of net profits that is given for charitable purposes, and the percentage of employees involved in community outreach projects and volunteer programs. The profiles made no mention of the term 'Corporate Social Responsibility' even in their descriptions of CSR activities.

Two pilot studies were conducted by the researchers. The first one was done to check whether there was a difference perceived in the descriptions of CSR given in the profiles. This was assessed on a sample of 20 participants of similar demographics as the target population. Five company profiles with differing descriptions of CSR were given to respondents and they were asked to fill out a questionnaire based on the profiles. The tool used was adapted from Duarte, 2014 ( $\alpha=.86$ ). The profile with the highest mean score and the lowest mean score were then compared using t-tests and the results were in line with the expectations of the researcher- the company profile with a description of high level of engagement in CSR activities was perceived to be significantly more socially responsible and concerned about the welfare of society ( $t=7.60$ ,  $p<0.000$ ) than the company with a description of low engagement in CSR activities.

The second pilot study was done to check if the three profiles were perceived to be similar in attractiveness when the descriptions of CSR activities of the companies were omitted (thus finding out whether the intervening variables had indeed been controlled). A sample of 58 participants was used for this study, and sample characteristics were kept similar to those of the target population. An online form was used for this assessment too. A one way ANOVA was done to compare the scores given to the three companies. Results showed no significant differences ( $F=1.81$ ,  $p=0.17$ ) in the mean scores of the companies,

indicating that the profiles were perceived as similarly attractive by respondents when the CSR descriptions were omitted from them.

Post the pilot studies, the online forms were prepared. The first two pages contained an informed consent form and demographic sheet on completing which the participant could proceed to a page that had the instructions and either one (High CSR, Low CSR, or No CSR) of the company profiles. The instructions stated 'Read the following profile carefully and then answer the questions on the basis of what you have read. You may go back to the profile if you feel the need to while filling the questionnaires by clicking the 'previous page' button.' This was followed by the company profile. The page after this contained the questionnaire on organizational attractiveness.

Each researcher reached out to potential participants via social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook and inquired about their willingness to participate in the study. Links to the online form were sent to those people who agreed to take part.

The data collected was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16. One-way repeated measures ANOVA and Tukey's post-hoc test were done in order to study the objectives of the study. The qualitative data was used to validate the findings of the research.

**RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS**

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations of the scores on organizational attractiveness given by respondents to the three company profiles.

**Table 1: Means and Standard Deviations of Scores on Organizational Attractiveness**

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
High CSR	40	38.78	6.59
Low CSR	40	33.26	6.63
No CSR	40	36.48	6.04

The highest score given by respondents was 49/50 to the High CSR profile and No CSR profiles and the lowest score given by respondents was 24/50 to the Low CSR and No CSR profiles.

Table 2 shows the results of the one-way independent measures ANOVA done to determine whether the mean scores given to the three profiles significantly differ.

**Table 2: One-way independent measures ANOVA of scores given to the three company profiles**

Effect	MS	df	F	P
Level of CSR	311.033	2	7.594	0.000**
Error	40.956	177		

Note: \* denotes significance at 0.05 level, \*\* denotes significance at 0.01 level

The difference between the means of the levels of CSR is statistically significant:  $F(2,177) = 7.594, p < 0.000$ . Thus, hypothesis 1(a) which states that there will be a statistically significant difference in the overall scores of Organizational Attractiveness given by respondents to the three company profiles is accepted.

Table 3 presents the results of the Tukey's HSD post-hoc test done to compare the means of the scores given to the profiles.

**Table 3: Tukey's HSD post-hoc test on scores of profiles**

Treatment Pairs	Tukey's HSD Q Statistic	p-value
High CSR vs Low CSR	5.585	0.001**
High CSR vs No CSR	2.273	0.247
Low CSR vs No CSR	3.212	0.064

Note: \* denotes significance at 0.05 level, \*\* denotes significance at 0.01 level

As can be seen from Table 3, the mean score of the High CSR profile differed significantly ( $p = .001$ ) from that of the Low CSR profile. However, the differences between the mean scores of the High CSR and No CSR profiles ( $p = .247$ ), and the Low CSR and No CSR profiles ( $p = .064$ ) did not differ in a statistically significant manner. Thus, the hypothesis 1 (b) that states scores of Organizational Attractiveness will be significantly higher for the company engaging in high levels of CSR activities as compared to the company with low levels of engagement

in CSR activities, is accepted while the hypothesis 1 (c) stating that the scores of Organizational Attractiveness given to the company whose profile had no mention of CSR activities will significantly differ from the companies whose profiles do, is rejected.

**DISCUSSION**

The study was designed to assess the effect of level of engagement in CSR activities on organizational attractiveness as perceived by a young Indian population. The F value calculated for the scores on organizational attractiveness given to the three company profiles was found to be significant. Results of the post-hoc test show that the scores given to the profile describing high CSR were significantly higher than those given to the profile describing low CSR. However, the scores given to the High CSR profile were not significantly greater than the scores given to the No CSR profile. The difference between the scores of the No CSR profile and the Low CSR profile were also insignificant.

It can be inferred from the results that CSR communication has a substantial role to play in influencing prospective employees' perceptions of an organization as an attractive place to work. The higher the level of engagement in CSR activities, the more favourably the organization is evaluated. Also, the absence of CSR communication was responded to ambiguously by respondents in the present study with the mean score of the No CSR profile being lower than that of the High CSR profile but not significantly so. This suggests that in the absence of a cue, the matter of a company's CSR activities does not seem occur to participants on their own.

A theory which validates the present finding is the **social identity theory** which suggests that people classify themselves into various social categories based on various factors, such as the organization they work for, and this membership then influences their self-concept (Dukerich, &Harquail, 1994). Therefore, as the corporate social performance will enhance a firm's image, will then lead to increase in the applicant's self-concept if they were to work in that firm (Dutton &Dukerich 1991).

The findings are validated through another view which explains the relationship between CSR and organization attractiveness. This theory was used to explain similar results found by Turban and Greening in their study on CSR and employer attractiveness. A firm's actions govern its social values, programmes and policies which then are expected to determine its reputation and attractiveness to the pool of applicants (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). This is rooted in the **signalling theory** which, suggests that a firm's social policies serve as a signal for interpreting its working conditions, therefore, suggesting what it will be like working for that firm. Hence, a firm's CSR, which is one of the social policies of the firm, signals its working conditions thereby governing its attractiveness to the job seekers (Chatman, 1989).

Another important theory to consider when looking at the present findings is the **person-organization fit theory** (Schneider, 1987), the prospective job applicant's specific values will influence the extent to which a firm's CSP influences that attraction (Turban and Greening, 2000). Thus, the better the CSR record of a company, the more participants may have felt that their ethical standards are well fit with the organization.

**IMPLICATIONS**

The findings could thus be indicative of increased emphasis and shift in values of young people towards bettering society and improving lives of the underprivileged. At the same time, results also seem to suggest that level of CSR activity influence the perception of the organisation only when information about the same has been communicated. The absence of the communication does not seem to have a negative impact on organizational attractiveness. However, it should be kept in mind that in the real-world setting, participants would visit many company profiles while in the process of applying for jobs, including ones wherein the CSR activity is communicated, thus making it likely for them to notice the absence of the communication.

A crucial implication of the present findings is that higher levels of engagement in CSR may lead to an increase in the number and therefore talent pool of applicants applying to an organization. Thus, results indicate that it may be beneficial for organizations to increase their level of engagement in CSR activities so as to improve their competitive advantage over other organizations. Additionally, firms should attempt to include information about their CSR activities in their recruitment procedures.

## LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Since the sample involved in the study was small the claim to generalizability should be made with caution. The chosen method of data collection was an online questionnaire; hence results were based on a single source of inquiry.

The entirety of the sample did not comprise students looking for jobs, because a portion of them were going to study further. As a result, it may be possible that they gave importance to organizational characteristics other than those prioritized by prospective job seekers. Furthermore, in testing respondents' perceptions about CSR initiatives, this study only exemplified charitable giving and community programs as CSR activities. These two types of CSR initiatives do not represent all companies' CSR programs, and this may have had an impact on respondents' perceptions.

Future research in this area could utilize multiple resources of data to study the variables of the present study. The sample could be diversified by including students from various universities across India, corporate employees, working professionals and different age groups. Further studies could also include various types of CSR programs beyond the two in the present study. Thus, the present study reveals several promising avenues for further research.

## CONCLUSION

Corporate social responsibility reflects an organization's status and activities with respect to its perceived societal obligations. The status it gains through CSR may often be unrelated to its ability to produce goods or services. The results of the present study revealed that an organization's level of engagement in corporate social responsibility has a significant impact on its perceived attractiveness. That is, the organization with high level of CSR was consistently rated higher than those with low, and no CSR, on general attractiveness as well as on their intent to apply. The findings suggest that organizations engaging in high level of CSR activities are perceived as more responsible, ethical, giving, and better spaces to work in.

## APPENDIX

### Vignettes of Company Profiles Magsons (High CSR)

Magsons was founded in Mumbai in 1938 by two Scottish engineers, Henning Holck and Soren Kristian. It is a provider of technology, engineering, construction and manufacturing and financial services conglomerate. Magsons offers comprehensive, end-to-end software solutions and services with a focus on Manufacturing, BFSI and Communications & Embedded Systems. The company has various branches all over India, the main offices being in Bangalore, New Delhi and Mumbai. The demand for the company's services is increasing globally and Magsons is currently in the process of opening offices in Beijing, San Francisco and London as well. In 2017, the company generated a net profit of Rs 10,108 crores. The average salary of a full-time employee was 24,00,000 per annum last year and also receive full medical coverage for themselves and their families from the company. Employees of Magsons may avail of up to two months of paid leave. Magsons invests 4% of its profits to research and development into green technology and another 4% to organisations working towards environmental protection. Magsons also collaborates with the government to promote the education of underprivileged children. Employees of Magsons are highly encouraged to volunteer hours for teaching children in understaffed government schools and are given paid time off for the same. Approximately 52% of employees at Magsons spend an average of 70 hours volunteering to teach. The necessary training and certification for this is also arranged for interested employees by the company.

### Bx Inc. (Low CSR)

Bx Inc. is an Indian IT services corporation headquartered in Bengaluru, India. An integrated corporation, BX Inc. offers a diverse range of products, solutions and services in systems, software, consumer care, healthcare, lighting and infrastructure technology. BX Inc.'s world-class technologies division provides a range of high-tech services such as global IT consulting, e-business integration, and legacy systems maintenance. The company started out with a sunflower oil business, and has since made significant progress. Currently, it has branches in Mumbai, Bengaluru, New Delhi, and Jakarta. With its solid reputation in these businesses, deep ties with major world companies, and plans to expand and open offices in the

United Kingdom, Germany, Paris, Singapore, the Middle East, and the United States, BX Inc. promised to quickly become a true multinational corporation. The sales have grown by 30% in the last five years and made a profit of Rs 10,548 crores in 2017. The average full-time employee earns around Rs 24,00,000 per annum (including health insurance and paid leave for 2 weeks).

The company donates less than 1% of net profits to non-profit organizations working towards improving the lives of the underprivileged in India. The organizations that the company donates to are selected every three years. Only about 20% of company employees are involved in their local communities. Participation in such activities is often difficult, however, since it is not easy to get time off from the company to attend important meetings.

### NSW Limited (No CSR)

NSW Limited was established in 2001 by Nalini Kapur in New Delhi. NSW delivers an entire spectrum of business process management services such as finance and accounting, customer interaction services, technology solutions, research and analytics and industry specific back office and front office processes. NSW offers business value to 350+ global clients by combining operational excellence with deep domain expertise in key industry verticals including Travel, Insurance, Banking and Financial Services. Its main branches are in Mumbai, New Delhi and Shanghai. NSW is rated among the best IT companies in India in the sphere of cutting-edge technology and analytics. NSW generated a net profit of Rs. 9,240 crores in 2017 with an increasing trend in the salaries of the employees. The current average salary of an NSW employee is Rs. 24,00,000 per annum. The company also has a 100% health insurance policy for all its employees. Employees receive two weeks of paid leave, plus additional paid medical leaves if need be. NSW aims to providing excellent quality product/services that combines performance with value of money, thus establishing successful relation with clients worldwide by 2021.

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