



Exploring the Path from CSR to Employer Attractiveness through Trust and Citizenship Intention

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Abstract. This study explores how Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Employer Branding influence Employer Attractiveness, with Public Trust and Organizational Citizenship Intention (OCI) acting as sequential mediators. Drawing upon Signaling Theory and Social Exchange Theory, a conceptual framework was tested using Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) based on data collected from 280 respondents representing the general population in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The findings confirm that both CSR and Employer Branding have significant direct effects on Employer Attractiveness, and their influence is further amplified through the mediating roles of trust and OCI. Public Trust significantly strengthens OCI, which in turn enhances the public's perception of the organization as an attractive employer. The model exhibits strong explanatory power, with R^2 values indicating substantial predictive relevance. This research contributes to the existing literature by extending the examination of employer attractiveness to a non-employee population and by emphasizing the importance of relational and behavioral mechanisms in organizational reputation management. The study also highlights the strategic value of authentic CSR initiatives and employer branding in building sustainable engagement with external stakeholders. Future research is encouraged to explore these relationships longitudinally and across different cultural contexts, particularly in the digital communication landscape.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, Employer Branding, Employer Attractiveness, Public Trust, Organizational Citizenship Intention

1 Introduction

In today's competitive and socially conscious labor market, organizations are increasingly turning to non-financial strategies such as corporate social responsibility (CSR) and employer branding to enhance their attractiveness to both potential and current employees. CSR initiatives, when well-communicated and authentically executed, not only improve organizational reputation but also signal a commitment to ethical values and social welfare. Employer branding, meanwhile, operates as a strategic narrative that communicates an organization's identity and culture to external audiences. When aligned with CSR, it can significantly elevate the public perception of a company, mak-

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ing it a desirable place to work [1, 2, 3]. These constructs are especially salient in regions undergoing economic transformation and labor market diversification such as South Sulawesi, Indonesia, where the energy, service, and education sectors are rapidly expanding and competing for skilled labor.

While prior studies confirm the positive impact of CSR and employer branding on employer attractiveness, the underlying psychological mechanisms that connect these constructs remain underexplored. In particular, the mediating roles of public trust the confidence society places in corporate integrity and organizational citizenship intention (OCI) the public's willingness to support and engage with the organization beyond transactional relationships are gaining attention [4, 5]. However, much of the existing literature is situated in Western or metropolitan contexts, relying heavily on samples from employees, job applicants, or students. There is limited research addressing how the general population in developing regions, such as Sulawesi Selatan, perceives and responds to CSR and employer branding efforts.

Furthermore, very few studies examine the combined effects of CSR and employer branding on employer attractiveness through sequential mediation, wherein CSR and branding first build trust, which in turn drives behavioral intentions like OCI that ultimately influence employer appeal. Addressing this gap is particularly important in South Sulawesi, where public institutions, state-owned enterprises, and private companies are increasingly evaluated not just by their products or services, but by their social accountability, ethical stance, and public engagement. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for organizations in the region seeking to enhance their talent pipelines, particularly among young professionals and recent graduates who place high value on purpose, authenticity, and social alignment.

Therefore, this study aims to develop and empirically test a structural model that examines how CSR and employer branding influence employer attractiveness in South Sulawesi, mediated sequentially by public trust and organizational citizenship intention. By adopting the structural equation modeling approach with partial least squares (SEM-PLS), and by sampling the general public across urban and semi-urban areas in South Sulawesi, this study provides empirical insight into how organizational image is shaped in culturally diverse, rapidly modernizing regions of Indonesia. The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically: expanding CSR-employer attractiveness frameworks to include trust and OCI as serial mediators, and offering regional insights that can inform more inclusive human capital strategies across Indonesia and Southeast Asia.

2 Literature Review

This study is grounded in the Signaling Theory and the Social Exchange Theory, which jointly provide the theoretical basis for understanding how corporate social responsibility (CSR) and employer branding shape perceptions of employer attractiveness. According to Signaling Theory, organizations send signals such as CSR initiatives and branding efforts to reduce information asymmetry and influence stakeholder perceptions [6]. These signals help external audiences, including job seekers and the general

public, infer the organization's values, ethics, and culture. Meanwhile, Social Exchange Theory posits that individuals evaluate relationships based on mutual benefit, reciprocity, and trust [7]. When an organization demonstrates ethical behavior through CSR and branding, it invites positive socio-psychological responses such as trust, identification, and voluntary engagement, which in turn enhance the organization's attractiveness as an employer.

Within this theoretical lens, CSR refers to organizational actions that go beyond economic obligations to include ethical, legal, philanthropic, and environmental responsibilities [8]. CSR serves as a powerful symbolic signal that communicates organizational values and priorities. Prior research has consistently shown that CSR initiatives contribute to employer attractiveness by enhancing organizational legitimacy, stakeholder pride, and perceived value congruence [3, 1, 2]. In emerging economies such as South Sulawesi, Indonesia, where community engagement and social contribution are deeply valued, CSR is often seen not just as a corporate strategy but as a moral commitment. Therefore, it is expected that individuals who perceive a company as socially responsible are more likely to find it appealing as an employer.

H1: Corporate Social Responsibility positively influences employer attractiveness.

Complementing CSR, employer branding is defined as the firm's effort to promote itself as an attractive workplace by highlighting its culture, values, and employee value propositions [9, 10]. From the signaling perspective, employer branding helps reduce uncertainty for prospective employees and the public by conveying credible and consistent messages about what the organization stands for. When employer branding integrates CSR values, it amplifies perceived authenticity and social orientation [11, 12, 13]. Especially in collectivist societies like Indonesia, employer branding strategies that reflect community concern and social purpose tend to elicit stronger emotional resonance and trust. Empirical studies confirm that employer branding is positively associated with employer attractiveness, particularly when aligned with personal values and societal expectations.

H2: Employer Branding positively influences employer attractiveness.

The relationship between CSR, employer branding, and employer attractiveness is not always direct, it often operates through psychological mediators, notably public trust. Public trust is the belief that an organization behaves with honesty, fairness, and integrity [14, 15]. Trust serves as a psychological translation of CSR and branding signals into perceptions of credibility and ethical alignment. In settings where individuals may not have direct access to internal organizational dynamics such as the general population in South Sulawesi public trust becomes a key interpretive lens for evaluating CSR messages [4, 5, 16]. Accordingly, CSR and employer branding are hypothesized to foster trust among the public.

H3: Corporate Social Responsibility positively influences public trust.

H4: Employer Branding positively influences public trust.

Building on trust, the next level of response involves Organizational Citizenship Intention (OCI) an emerging concept that extends Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) beyond formal employee roles. OCI refers to the willingness of individuals, including non-employees, to voluntarily support and promote an organization [17, 18].

According to Social Exchange Theory, when individuals perceive fairness and prosocial values in an organization, they are more likely to reciprocate with supportive attitudes and behaviors even in the absence of contractual obligation. Public trust is a critical antecedent to OCI, as it creates a relational foundation for individuals to internalize organizational values and express goodwill [5, 19].

H5: Public trust positively influences organizational citizenship intention.

OCI, in turn, enhances employer attractiveness by intensifying psychological connection and value alignment with the organization. Individuals who are willing to advocate for an organization, even informally, tend to perceive it as a more desirable workplace. This positive perception is shaped by emotional engagement, perceived fit, and anticipated fulfillment [20, 21]. Thus:

H6: Organizational citizenship intention positively influences employer attractiveness.

Recent literature further suggests that sequential mediation may occur. Specifically, corporate social responsibility (CSR) and employer branding may initially foster public trust, which subsequently cultivates organizational citizenship intention (OCI), and ultimately leads to enhanced employer attractiveness. This serial mediation model reflects a layered process in which symbolic organizational signals such as CSR and employer branding generate psychological responses in the form of trust, which then translate into behavioral intentions like OCI, culminating in favorable evaluations of employer attractiveness [4, 18, 17, 5]. However, this causal pathway remains empirically underexplored, particularly in non-Western contexts where communal values, collective identity, and social perceptions tend to exert a stronger influence on how individuals interpret and respond to organizational cues [22, 23, 24].

H7: Public trust and organizational citizenship intention sequentially mediate the relationship between corporate social responsibility and employer attractiveness.

H8: Public trust and organizational citizenship intention sequentially mediate the relationship between employer branding and employer attractiveness.

In summary, drawing from signaling theory and social exchange theory, this study proposes that CSR and employer branding influence employer attractiveness, both directly and through a serial pathway of public trust and OCI. The model offers a novel contribution by empirically validating these relationships using data from the general public in South Sulawesi, a region where public perception and trust are deeply rooted in cultural and social dynamics.

3 Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional design using structured survey data collected from the general public in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, to examine the influence of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and employer branding on employer attractiveness, with public trust and organizational citizenship intention as sequential mediators. Data were gathered through an online questionnaire distributed via social media platforms and university/community networks, targeting individuals aged 18 to 45 re-

siding in urban and semi-urban areas such as Makassar, Gowa, and Parepare. A purposive sampling technique was employed, resulting in 280 valid responses. Measurement instruments were adapted from established sources, including Maignan & Ferrell

[25] for CSR, Berthon et al. [9] for employer branding, Mayer et al. [14] for public trust, Podsakoff et al. [26] for organizational citizenship intention, and Highhouse et al. [27] for employer attractiveness, with all items measured on a five-point Likert scale. Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) via SmartPLS 4.0, in accordance with the recommendations of Hair et al. [28], who emphasize PLS-SEM's suitability for predictive models, complex mediation structures, and theory development in social sciences. The sample size exceeded the minimum threshold of ten times the maximum number of arrows pointing to a latent variable, as suggested by Hair et al. [28], ensuring sufficient statistical power. The analysis included evaluation of the measurement model (internal consistency reliability, convergent and discriminant validity) and the structural model (path coefficients, effect sizes, R^2 , Q^2 , and bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples). To address potential endogeneity and enhance internal validity, the model was grounded in strong theoretical justifications (Signaling Theory and Social Exchange Theory), while multicollinearity was checked using inner VIF values (all < 3.3), and temporal separation was applied in the questionnaire design to reduce common method bias. These steps collectively support the robustness and interpretability of the causal relationships tested in the model.

4 Results

4.1 Respondents' Demographic Profile

Before testing the hypothesized structural model, descriptive statistics were conducted to profile the sample population. Understanding the demographic characteristics of respondents provides contextual insight into the representativeness and diversity of the sample, particularly in relation to the study's focus on perceptions of CSR and employer attractiveness within the public domain in South Sulawesi. The data were collected from 280 valid respondents, representing individuals aged between 18 and 45 years, drawn from urban and semi-urban areas such as Makassar, Gowa, Parepare, and Bone. Table 1 below summarizes the key demographic attributes of the sample, including gender, age group, education level, employment status, and monthly income bracket.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 280)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	118	42.1
	Female	162	57.9
Age	18–24 years	112	40.0
	25–34 years	104	37.1
	35–45 years	64	22.9
Education Level	Senior High School	52	18.6

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Employment Status	Diploma/Bachelor's Degree	180	64.3
	Master's Degree or higher	48	17.1
	Student	96	34.3
	Employed (Public/Private)	138	49.3
	Entrepreneur/Freelancer	28	10.0
Monthly Income	Unemployed	18	6.4
	< IDR 2 million	92	32.9
	IDR 2 – 4.9 million	134	47.9
	≥ IDR 5 million	54	19.3

Source: Primary Data Process

The demographic data indicate a well-distributed and diverse sample across age, gender, educational attainment, and employment status. Female respondents constituted the majority of the sample (57.9%), with males accounting for 42.1%. The sample was predominantly composed of younger individuals, with 77.1% falling within the 18–34 age bracket reflecting the relevance of CSR and employer branding perceptions among Millennials and Generation Z. In terms of education, 64.3% of respondents held a diploma or undergraduate degree, while 17.1% had attained postgraduate qualifications, suggesting a generally educated population. Employment-wise, nearly half (49.3%) of the participants were employed, while 34.3% were students further supporting the study's emphasis on public perceptions of employer attractiveness. Income levels were relatively moderate, with 47.9% earning between IDR 2 million and 4.9 million per month, indicative of Indonesia's middle-income segment. Overall, the demographic profile supports the generalizability of findings to a wide spectrum of public stakeholders in South Sulawesi.

4.2 Measurement Model Assessment

To evaluate the measurement model, this study followed the two-step approach recommended by Hair et al. [28], which involves assessing individual item reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. First, the outer loadings of each indicator were examined. Items with loadings ≥ 0.70 were retained, while a few marginal indicators with loadings between 0.60 and 0.70 were retained if the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Composite Reliability (CR) for the construct remained within acceptable thresholds. Table 2 summarizes the results of construct reliability and validity.

Table 2. Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)	0.861	0.893	0.626
Employer Branding (EB)	0.845	0.880	0.596
Public Trust (PT)	0.872	0.907	0.709
Organizational Citizenship Intention (OCI)	0.827	0.878	0.643
Employer Attractiveness (EA)	0.891	0.919	0.692

Source: Primary Data Process

All constructs met the threshold for internal consistency reliability, with Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values exceeding the minimum recommended values of 0.70 and 0.70 respectively. Convergent validity was also confirmed, as all AVE values exceeded the 0.50 threshold, indicating that each latent variable explains more than 50% of the variance in its indicators.

To assess discriminant validity, the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio was used, which is a more conservative criterion than the traditional Fornell-Larcker test. Table 3 presents the HTMT values for all latent construct pairs.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity – HTMT Ratio

Constructs	CSR	EB	PT	OCI	EA
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)	0.644	0.598	0.565	0.612	
Employer Branding (EB)		0.613	0.588	0.631	
Public Trust (PT)			0.615	0.672	
Organizational Citizenship Intention (OCI)				0.693	
Employer Attractiveness (EA)					

Source: Primary Data Process

All HTMT values are below the threshold of 0.85, satisfying the criterion for discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015), and indicating that each construct is empirically distinct from the others. As a result, the measurement model demonstrates satisfactory reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity, and is suitable for proceeding with structural model analysis.

4.3 Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

Following confirmation of the measurement model's reliability and validity, the next step involved evaluating the structural model to test the hypothesized relationships among constructs. This analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) via SmartPLS 4.0, following the procedures outlined

by Hair et al. [28]. Key evaluation criteria included the analysis of path coefficients (β), t-statistics, p-values, R^2 (explained variance), f^2 effect sizes, and Q^2 predictive relevance. A bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 subsamples was performed to assess the statistical significance of the direct and indirect effects.

Table 4. Hypothesis Testing Results (Direct and Indirect Effects)

Hypothesis	Relationship	β (Path Coef.)	t-value	p-value
H1	CSR \rightarrow EA	0.192	2.911	0.004
H2	EB \rightarrow EA	0.256	4.328	<0.001
H3	CSR \rightarrow PT	0.348	5.612	<0.001
H4	EB \rightarrow PT	0.278	4.113	<0.001
H5	PT \rightarrow OCI	0.401	6.221	<0.001
H6	OCI \rightarrow EA	0.309	5.087	<0.001
H7	CSR \rightarrow PT \rightarrow OCI \rightarrow EA	0.043	3.012	0.003
H8	EB \rightarrow PT \rightarrow OCI \rightarrow EA	0.034	2.517	0.012

Source: Primary Data Process

All hypothesized paths were found to be statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), including both direct and sequential indirect effects. Notably, both CSR and Employer Branding influenced Employer Attractiveness (EA) directly and indirectly through Public Trust (PT) and Organizational Citizenship Intention (OCI), confirming the proposed serial mediation model.

5 Discussion

This study sought to advance understanding of how Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Employer Branding contribute to Employer Attractiveness through the dual mediating roles of Public Trust and Organizational Citizenship Intention (OCI), using data from the general population in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The findings robustly support all hypothesized relationships, offering both theoretical alignment with prior research and novel empirical insights from a collectivist, emerging market context.

The direct effects observed between CSR and Employer Attractiveness affirm the proposition that organizational responsibility serves as a key signaling mechanism in shaping public perceptions [3, 1]. In alignment with Signaling Theory, the positive and significant coefficient for CSR suggests that social initiatives are interpreted by the public as authentic indicators of the firm's ethical stance and long-term orientation. Moreover, the significant path from Employer Branding to Employer Attractiveness reinforces prior studies emphasizing the reputational value of brand-based HR strategies [9, 22], especially when embedded in CSR narratives. This dual impact reflects the growing consensus that employer branding is most effective when underpinned by substantive social value propositions [12, 11, 10].

Beyond these direct effects, the structural model reveals a critical mechanism: the sequential mediation via Public Trust and OCI. Both CSR and Employer Branding were

found to significantly enhance Public Trust, which in turn strengthened individuals' intention to engage in voluntary, pro-organizational behaviors. These findings resonate with the Social Exchange Theory, which posits that trust, built on perceived organizational goodwill, encourages reciprocal behaviors such as citizenship intentions [5, 17, 15]. This trust-based mechanism validates the mediating framework proposed in earlier meta-analytic and experimental research [4, 29, 30] and extends it to a broader societal sample beyond the employee or student populations typically studied.

Notably, the significant indirect effects from CSR and Employer Branding to Employer Attractiveness via the sequential path of Public Trust and OCI confirm the conceptual robustness of the serial mediation model. This provides empirical support to the integrative framework of Carlini and Grace [12], wherein organizational attractiveness emerges from a layered process involving values alignment, relational trust, and extrarole identification. These findings also align with Li and Chen [18], who argue that prosocial signaling alone is insufficient unless it translates into cognitive-emotional trust and behavioral intention.

The explanatory power of the model further substantiates its relevance. With R^2 values exceeding 0.60 for Employer Attractiveness, the model demonstrates considerable ability to capture the variance in stakeholder perception an outcome that meets or exceeds thresholds recommended by Hair et al. [28] for social science research using PLSSEM. Importantly, these results are grounded in data from a non-corporate population, suggesting that CSR and branding efforts impact not only employees or job seekers, but also shape general public sentiment, which is critical in labor-constrained or reputation-sensitive sectors.

Moreover, the results underscore the importance of authenticity and consistency in CSR and branding strategies. While all tested paths were statistically supported, the strength of the mediation pathways suggests that the public does not passively absorb CSR messaging but evaluates it through the lens of trust and congruence with perceived organizational behavior. This nuance is consistent with critiques in the literature highlighting the backlash effect of perceived CSR hypocrisy [24, 31, 16], underscoring the need for organizations to align external communication with internal values and practices.

In summary, the findings reaffirm the strategic significance of CSR and Employer Branding in enhancing employer attractiveness, not merely through reputation-building but via relational and behavioral mechanisms. Public Trust and Organizational Citizenship Intention emerge as central mediators in this process, validating and extending existing theoretical models in the field. The study contributes both conceptually and methodologically by integrating signaling and exchange theories within a structural framework tested in a non-traditional, underexplored context.

6 Conclusion

This study concludes that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Employer Branding play a significant and interconnected role in enhancing Employer Attractiveness

through the mediating pathways of Public Trust and Organizational Citizenship Intention (OCI). The findings confirm that CSR and branding efforts are not only valued as external image enhancers but are also internalized by the public through trust-based evaluations that lead to prosocial behavioral intentions. The integration of Signaling Theory and Social Exchange Theory within the tested model provides theoretical clarity on how individuals cognitively and affectively process organizational values and initiatives. This study also contributes empirically by focusing on a broader societal sample in South Sulawesi, thereby expanding the scope of employer attractiveness literature beyond traditional employee or job seeker populations.

Despite its contributions, several avenues remain for future inquiry. A longitudinal approach would allow researchers to capture the dynamic evolution of trust and engagement over time as CSR and branding initiatives are sustained. Additionally, future studies may introduce moderating constructs such as perceived CSR authenticity or corporate hypocrisy to account for contextual differences in how organizational messages are interpreted. As digital employer branding continues to rise in prominence, further exploration into the role of social media transparency, algorithmic CSR communication, and virtual trust-building is also warranted. Cross-national comparisons may enhance external validity, particularly within cultures that differ in their institutional trust norms and perceptions of organizational legitimacy. Such advancements would refine the theoretical framework and enhance the practical applicability of CSR and branding strategies in global talent and stakeholder markets.

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