



EXAMINING HOW BUSINESS SCHOOL FACULTY'S PERCEPTION OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AFFECTS EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: THE ROLE OF ORGANIZATIONAL TRUST AS A MEDIATOR

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ABSTRACT

The lack of understanding about how Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) influences faculty engagement in business schools presents a challenge for higher education institutions, especially in developing countries like Nepal. While CSR is often studied in corporate settings, there is limited research on its impact within academic environments, where faculty members play a central role. This study examines how faculty perceptions of CSR affect their engagement at work, with organizational trust as a mediating factor. A quantitative survey was conducted using purposive sampling, and responses were collected from 239 faculty members working in business schools across Nepal. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed to investigate the relationships between perceived Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), organizational trust, and faculty engagement. The results indicate that faculty members' positive views of corporate social responsibility (CSR) are associated with increased engagement and trust in their institutions. Moreover, organizational trust was found to mediate the relationship between CSR and engagement partially. This confirms that when faculty members perceive their institutions as socially responsible, they are more likely to trust their organization and be engaged in their roles. The findings contribute to existing research by demonstrating that CSR, often regarded as an external-facing strategy, also plays a crucial role internally in fostering trust and engagement among academic staff. The study adds new knowledge to the fields of business ethics, higher education, and organizational behavior by highlighting the importance of CSR perceptions and organizational trust within the academic context of Nepal's business schools.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has gained prominence as a strategic and ethical imperative across sectors, including higher education (Che et al., 2025). However, academic institutions, especially business schools, have not received adequate scholarly attention in this regard (Singh et al., 2023). Despite their vital role in cultivating ethical leadership and promoting business ethics, business schools are seldom examined as organizations where corporate social responsibility (CSR) is enacted internally (Rhodes & Pullen, 2023; Wu, 2024). Faculty members, who play a central role in shaping the ethical compass of future leaders, are key actors whose perceptions of corporate social responsibility (CSR) merit deeper exploration.

A critical concern is the limited understanding of how CSR, when perceived by faculty, influences internal organizational outcomes such as employee engagement (EE). While EE is widely recognized as essential for institutional innovation and effectiveness, the psychological and organizational mechanisms linking CSR to EE remain understudied (Bauer, 2022; K. Park et al., 2024). In particular, organizational trust (OT) has been proposed as a mediating factor; however, its role in academic settings remains insufficiently explored. Although trust is fundamental to creating collaborative and cohesive work environments, its influence on CSR-related engagement in higher education has not been adequately theorized or empirically tested (Yu et al., 2021).

Prior research has often focused on CSR's external image-building or its impact on students, leaving a gap in understanding how faculty interpret and respond to CSR within their institutions (Abrahão et al., 2024). This study addresses

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that gap by examining how faculty members in business schools perceive CSR and how this perception affects their engagement, with a specific focus on the mediating role of organizational trust.

Using a quantitative research approach, the study surveyed 325 participants, comprising faculty members from business schools, to explore these relationships. Data was analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) via SmartPLS 4. The results confirm that faculty members' perception of CSR positively influences their engagement. Furthermore, the mediating effect of organizational trust is supported, reinforcing the view that faculty engagement is shaped not just by CSR initiatives but also by the level of trust within the institution.

This study contributes to the CSR literature in higher education by highlighting the internal dynamics of CSR perception and engagement among faculty. It also provides empirical insights into how trust functions as a critical link in enhancing institutional performance through employee engagement. The remainder of the study is divided into a review of the literature, materials and methods, discussions, and conclusions. Future directions are also reported in the concluding section of this paper.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Background

Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Social Identity Theory (SIT)

Two commonly used theoretical frameworks for describing the connections between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Organizational Theory (OT) are Social Exchange Theory (SET) (Homans, 1969) and Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Paruzel et al., 2020), as noted in studies such as Jones (2010). SET revolves around the concept of reciprocity and is one of the most prominent theories that aim to explain the process by which trust is cultivated within an organization (George et al., 2021). When employees perceive their organization as just, compassionate, and supportive, they are more likely to reciprocate similar behavior (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Over time, this reciprocal behavior cultivates loyalty, commitment, and trust (Farooq et al., 2014).

SIT (Gond et al., 2017) is the primary theoretical framework used to explain how CSR positively affects employees. SIT (Tajfel, 1982) suggests that people define themselves in terms of their group memberships. Therefore, when employees see their values reflected in their organization's corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities, they react positively (Hu et al., 2020). This Identification with a group stems from feelings of belonging and emotional connection (Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Ma et al., 2021).

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

CSR involves a combination of economic gains and social benefits, where companies contribute to enhancing society (Davis, 1973). It is the duty of a company to its diverse stakeholders, including staff, customers, and the general public (Ansu-Mensah et al., 2021; Kang et al., 2016). The Nepalese higher education system is slowly prioritizing Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in its daily operations and research. Many universities, especially business schools, include topics related to business ethics and corporate social responsibility (CSR) in their curricula, but it is not a compulsory component across all disciplines. Nepal's education policy and guidelines encourage corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, but there are no policies that mandate universities to implement such initiatives. Nepal's business schools are facing a growing demand to uphold social responsibility and ethical standards (Bajracharya et al., 2024). While there is a primary emphasis on academic success, a growing awareness of the importance of executing CSR initiatives is also evident (Chapagain, 2020). CSR initiatives in Nepal's higher education institutions (HEIs) are expanding through various programs, including community service, environmentally sustainable initiatives, and efforts to integrate underprivileged segments into educational institutions. These initiatives can help strengthen the brand image, reputation, stakeholder perception, well-being of teachers, and quality of education of HEIs (Bajracharya et al., 2024; Wu, 2024). It is a strategic priority for universities and serves as an internal compass for both university improvement and its external reputation (Latif et al., 2022).

Employee perceptions are important because they affect attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions (Cheema et al., 2019). Employee behavior is often driven by their interpretation of reality rather than by objective reality. According to Hansen et al. (2011), perceptions of CSR initiatives are more important than CSR initiatives. Studying employees' perceptions of corporate social responsibility (CSR) provides valuable insights into the alignment of organizational values with employees' beliefs, thereby cultivating a shared vision and sense of belonging among staff. Additionally, understanding these perceptions enables companies to tailor their CSR strategies more effectively, meeting employee expectations and enhancing employee engagement. CSR's core philosophy is the ethical responsibility to contribute to society, both human and natural resources. Therefore, input from various societal groups and stakeholders, particularly employees, is crucial for sustainable business (George et al., 2021).

CSR and Employee Engagement (EE)

EE is a critical aspect of organizational psychology and management studies, representing the depth of emotional connection, dedication, and participation of employees toward their jobs and the organization they belong to. It ensures that the staff are committed to the organization's values and simultaneously enhances individuals' sense of satisfaction and fulfillment. Rooted in SET, EE emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between an organization and its workforce, wherein engaged employees are more likely to put in extra effort, contribute creative ideas, and demonstrate significant levels of productivity. Engaged employees tend to exhibit greater job satisfaction, lower absenteeism rates, decreased turnover, and improved overall performance, all of which are pivotal for organizational success and sustainability (Buhler, 2006; Hakanen & Schaufeli, 2012). Efficient communication, bonuses, work-life balance, regular appraisals, career development opportunities, favorable working conditions, effective teamwork, and overall job satisfaction are some of the key elements that enhance employee engagement.

CSR is positively linked to EE (Caligiuri et al., 2013; Glavas, 2016; Tsourvakas & Yfantidou, 2018). A positive relationship between CSR and EE stems from employees finding more profound meaning and alignment with company values (Glavas, 2012). Consequently, this instills a sense of contributing one's complete self to the work environment (Rich et al., 2010). By participating in CSR initiatives, organizations move beyond mere rhetoric in their value statements to effectively communicate their core values to their employees (Jones et al., 2014). However, the relationship between CSR and EE differs based on the culture and industries under study (Chaudhary, 2017). Drawing from SET and SIT and the related arguments made above, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Faculty members' perception of CSR is positively related to EE.

CSR and Organizational Trust (OT)

Trust, as described by Bozic et al. (2019), is a mental state characterized by positive beliefs about another's intentions or actions that enable openness and vulnerability in relationships. These positive expectations stem from perceptions of the other party's trustworthiness, shaped by mutually beneficial interactions in the past (Tzafrir & Dolan, 2004). Trust is an important form of social capital, in addition to human and physical capital, that influences a country's economic growth (Francois & Zabojsnik, 2005; Kong et al., 2023). Organizational trust (OT) entails perceptions, beliefs, or anticipations concerning the probability that another party's forthcoming actions will be advantageous, favorable, or non-detrimental (Cui & Jiao, 2019). Aureliyah Putri and Kusuma (2022) argue that business trust includes overlooking mistakes based on positive assumptions.

OT is a foundational element crucial for cultivating positive relationships and effective collaboration in the workplace. Rooted in SET and organizational psychology, trust within an organization is built on a mutual belief in the reliability, honesty, and capabilities of leaders, colleagues, and the organization. When employees perceive their leaders and peers as trustworthy, they are more likely to work with dedication, loyalty, and cooperation, which in turn brings productivity and innovation to the organization. Moreover, trust facilitates open communication, risk-taking, and conflict resolution. It helps build a supportive and inclusive workplace where individuals feel psychologically open to expressing their opinions, voicing concerns, and engaging in constructive dialogue. Therefore, nurturing and maintaining open and transparent communication is essential for cultivating a positive organizational culture and achieving long-term success. This trust, in turn, is responsible for organizational achievement and creating competitive advantage (Berraies et al., 2021).

CSR initiatives send signals to employees regarding their values, ethics, and trustworthiness (Rupp et al., 2006). These initiatives also cultivate greater employee trust in organizations that demonstrate a commitment to societal and employee well-being (Vuong & Bui, 2023). Many companies use CSR to cultivate OT (Yan et al., 2022). Research has shown a strong positive link between CSR efforts and OT (Tourigny et al., 2019). Accordingly, we hypothesized that

Hypothesis 2: There is a positive relationship between faculty perceptions of CSR and OT.

Organizational Trust (OT) and Employee Engagement (EE)

EE is a measure of motivation and shares similarities with organizational commitment (Roberts & Davenport, 2002). Therefore, trust in an organization may be associated with work engagement (Ugwu et al., 2014). OT helps increase knowledge exchange, which, in turn, boosts EE (Wong et al., 2010). Trust plays a crucial role in enabling staff to concentrate on their work, thereby increasing motivation, investment, and engagement. When staff perceive their company as trustworthy, they invest themselves fully in their work, causing a higher level of engagement and motivation.

Hypothesis 3: OT is positively related to EE.

OT likely mediates the relationship between faculty perceptions of CSR and EE. Institutions that exhibit good social behavior are most likely to be regarded as trustworthy by their employees (Rupp et al., 2006). This trust can augment the employer-employee relationship and increase work engagement (Chughtai & Buckley, 2008; Lin, 2010). CSR initiatives signal to employees that the organization values their well-being, instilling higher trust among employees, which in turn fosters positive perceptions and behavior toward the firm (Farooq et al., 2014). The empirical findings indicate that trust acts as a mediator between the factors that lead to trust and the behavioral outcomes of employees (Colquitt et al., 2007). Thus, the following hypothesis has been formulated:

Hypothesis 4: The positive relationship between faculties' CSR perceptions and EE is mediated by OT.

The research model is presented in Figure 1.

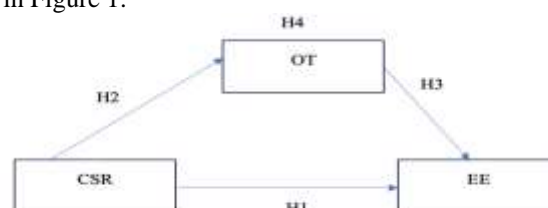


Figure 1. Theoretical model

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sample and Data Collection

Data were collected via email using questionnaires from full-time and part-time business school faculty members (full-time and part-time) all over Nepal. The questionnaire included all the details regarding the study's objectives, data confidentiality, respondent anonymity, and informed consent. Using purposeful sampling, the researchers gathered data from 239 respondents out of approximately 320 distributed questionnaires. Purposive sampling was employed as a non-probability technique because it aligned with the specific criteria set forth by the research objectives, wherein participants (faculty) were selected based on predetermined characteristics relevant to the study. B-school faculty members were selected because they are not only responsible for teaching CSR in academic work but also influence how CSR is perceived and implemented in organizations. These faculties' perceptions regarding CSR can impact their engagement level in B-schools, making them a relevant population for this study.

Demographics

Among the 239 surveyed samples, male respondents were higher (65.7 %) than female respondents (32.6 %). Most respondents had 0-5 years of teaching experience (accounting for 33.9%), followed by 6-10 years (25.9%). The age distribution of the respondents showed a concentration in the 31–35-year range (30.6%), followed by the 36-40-year range (23.1%). Most respondents (62.7%) were married. Regarding education, respondents with graduate (or Master's) degrees were predominant at 76.1%, followed by those with undergraduate (or Bachelor's) degrees, accounting for 15.7%. Regarding monthly income levels, respondents earning between \$ 45,001 and \$ 60,000 were the most numerous, accounting for 32.8% of the total. Nearly a quarter (23.9%) of respondents had incomes in the 60001-75000 range.

Research Instrument

A five-point Likert scale was used in this study. The scale ranged from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5).

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): Employee perceptions of CSR initiatives were assessed using a 3-item scale adapted from Du et al. (2007) and Wagner et al. (2009). This scale has been used in various other studies (Brammer et al., 2015) and demonstrated a reliability of 0.837 in the current study.

Organizational Trust (OT): To measure OT, we relied on a 4-item scale developed by Cummings and Bromiley (1996). The reliability of this scale was 0.893.

Employee Engagement (EE): EE was measured using a 4-item scale developed by Rich et al. (2010). The scale demonstrated a reliability of 0.843.

Common Method Bias

In recent decades, researchers in social science and organization studies have emphasized common method bias and its effect on research findings. Common method bias is the spurious "variance that is attributable to the measurement method rather than to the constructs that measures are assumed to represent" (Podsakoff et al., 2012). Reio (2010) suggests that this bias can compromise the reliability and validity of constructs, creating systematic bias in the perceived relationships among variables.

The correlation matrix procedure was used to assess the impact of common method bias through latent constructs, where a correlation coefficient $r > 0.9$ between the principal constructs was considered indicative of the presence of common method bias (Tehseen et al., 2017).

Analyses Strategy

This study used IBM SPSS Statistics (version 27) and AMOS (version 24) to analyze the data. Structural equation modeling (SEM), a theory-based approach, was employed to test the pre-defined hypotheses regarding the causal relationships between the measured and latent variables (Mueller & Hancock, 2018). Following Hair et al. (2013), SEM was conducted in two steps. First, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to assess the reliability and validity of the constructs. Convergent validity was evaluated using Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criteria, requiring an average variance extracted (AVE) of at least 0.50 and composite reliability (CR) greater than 0.70. Discriminant validity was confirmed if the maximum shared variance (MSV) and average shared variance (ASV) were lower than the average variance extracted (AVE) (Hair et al., 2010). Additionally, the Fornell-Larcker criteria and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations were used to validate further discriminant validity (Ab Hamid et al., 2017).

Once construct reliability and validity were established, the study hypotheses were tested by estimating the structural equation parameters using maximum likelihood estimation. A bootstrap sample of 2,000 was used to estimate the indirect effect of CSR perception on employee engagement, with a 95% confidence interval (Ibrahim et al., 2023).

RESULTS

Primary Analysis

Initially, the data were scrutinized for fundamental assumptions (e.g., missing values, unengaged responses, outliers, and normality). The data were collected from Google Forms, where participants were required to respond to every question, resulting in no missing values.

Following Kline's (2005) instructions, 239 responses were examined for outliers, where we applied the Mahalanobis distance at $p < 0.000$ as a criterion for identifying significant outliers. No significant outliers were observed in the data.

Data normality was assessed according to Byrne's (2010) guidelines. The skewness and kurtosis values were within the acceptable ranges of ± 1 and ± 3 , respectively, indicating a normal distribution.

Common Method Bias

Table 1. Correlation between the constructs

	Corporate social responsibility	Organizational Trust	Employee engagement
Corporate social responsibility	1		
Organizational Trust	.603(***)	1	
Employee engagement	.765(***)	.751(***)	1

***significant at 0.001 level (Two-tailed)

Table 1 shows that the correlation between the constructs was less than 0.9. Thus, common method bias was not a concern in the present study. Further, it also shows the relationship between variables. The results indicate a significant relationship between organizational trust and corporate social responsibility. Additionally, employee engagement is found to have a positive and significant relationship with both corporate social responsibility and organizational trust.

Measurement Model Evaluation

We conducted a confirmatory factor analysis to assess the fit of our measurement model to the data. We used a factor loading cutoff of ≥ 0.5 for each item. We assessed goodness of fit using the following criteria: chi-square/degrees of freedom, Tucker-Lewis's index ($TLI \geq 0.9$), comparative fit index ($CFI \geq 0.9$), and root mean square error of approximation ($RMSEA \leq 0.08$) (Sathyanarayana & Mohanasundaram, 2024). The model fit indices suggest that our measurement model is suitable for further analyses.

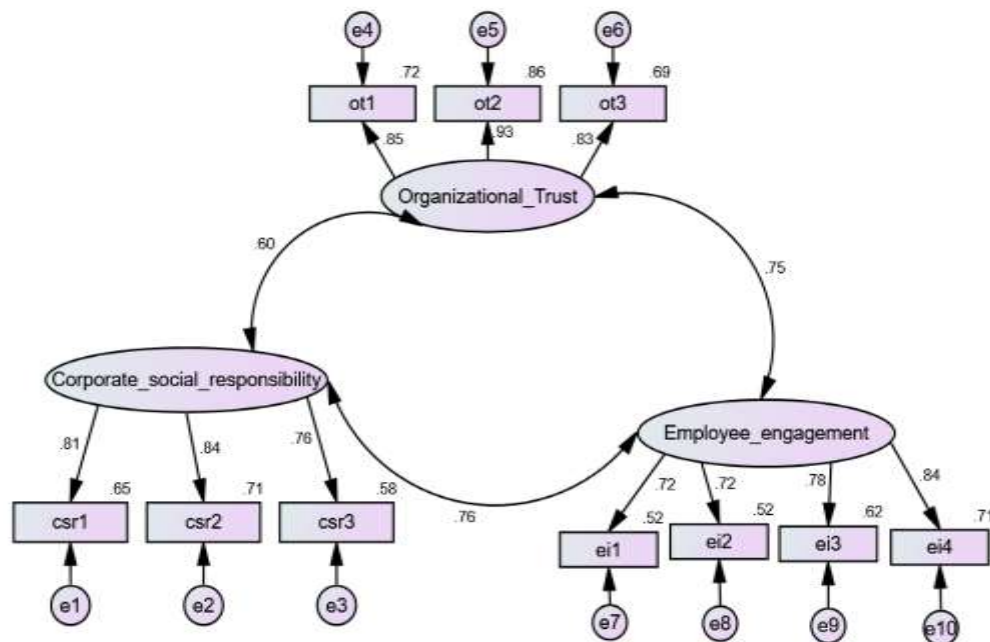


Figure 2. Measurement model with factor loadings

Figure 2 illustrates the measurement model, which includes factor loadings that show the relationships between the latent constructs—Corporate Social Responsibility, Organizational Trust, and Employee Engagement—and their observed indicators in confirmatory factor analysis.

To ensure the accuracy of the measures, the study evaluated convergent and discriminant validity, confirming the reliability and validity of the constructs. Reliability was deemed acceptable because all constructs demonstrated a Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha of 0.70 or higher (Cheema et al., 2019; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 2 shows that $AVE \geq 0.5$ and $CR \geq 0.7$ for all constructs. Thus, the convergent validity of all constructs was adequate. Table 3 shows that

the square root of each construct's Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is greater than its correlation with other latent constructs, thus fulfilling the Fornell and Larcker criterion for discriminant validity. Furthermore, Table 4 presents that the correlation between the model constructs is less than 0.85, satisfying the Heterotriat-Monotriat ratio of correlation criteria and indicating discriminant validity.

Table 2. Factor loading, reliability, and validity test of the model

Construct	Items	Factor	Loadings	CR	AVE	MSV	ASV
Corporate social responsibility	csr1		0.805	0.845	0.646	0.585	0.468
	csr2		0.843				
	csr3		0.761				
Organizational Trust	ot1		0.849	0.903	0.757	0.564	0.461
	ot2		0.926				
	ot3		0.833				
Employee engagement	ei1		0.719	0.851	0.59	0.585	0.57
	ei2		0.721				
	ei3		0.785				
	ei4		0.840				

Abbreviations: CR=Composite reliability, AVE=Average Variance Extracted, MSV=Maximum Shared variance, ASV=Average shared variance

Table 2 presents the factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), maximum shared variance (MSV), and average shared variance (ASV) for each construct, demonstrating the model's reliability and convergent and discriminant validity.

Table 3. Fornell and Larcker Criterion

Construct	Corporate social responsibility	Organizational Trust	Employee engagement
Corporate social responsibility	0.804		
Organizational Trust	0.603	0.87	
Employee engagement	0.765	0.751	0.768

Note: The bold number represents AVE's square root of the AVE, while the off-diagonal number represents the correlation between the constructs.

Table 3 presents the Fornell and Larcker Criterion, where the bold diagonal values indicate the square roots of the AVEs for each construct, all exceeding the inter-construct correlations, thereby supporting discriminant validity.

Table 4. Heterotriat-Monotrait Criteria

Construct	Corporate social responsibility	Organizational Trust	Employee engagement
Corporate social responsibility	—		
Organizational Trust	0.63	—	
Employee engagement	0.783	0.777	—

Table 4 displays the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratios of correlations between constructs, all of which are below the recommended threshold of 0.90, indicating adequate discriminant validity among the constructs.

Hypothesis testing

The direct and indirect relationships between the constructs were analyzed using structural equation modeling.

Hypothesis Testing for Direct Effect

Table 5 displays the standardized beta coefficients, which show the direct relationships between the constructs. A significant positive link was found between CSR perception and employee engagement (EE) ($\beta = 0.759$, $p < 0.001$), supporting Hypothesis 1. Similarly, Hypothesis 2 was supported, as CSR perception had a significant positive impact on organizational Identification ($\beta = 0.592$, $p < 0.001$). Organizational Identification also had a significant positive effect on EE ($\beta = 0.749$, $p < 0.001$), supporting Hypothesis 3. In summary, all direct effects were significant and positive in this study.

Table 5. Hypothesis testing for direct effect

Regression paths	Hypothesis	Estimate	p value	R ²	Remarks
CSR perceptions ---> Employee Engagement	H1	0.759***	<0.001	0.579	Supported
CSR perceptions ---> Organizational Identification	H2	0.592***	<0.001	0.35	Supported
Organizational Identification ---> Employee Engagement	H3	0.749***	<0.001	0.56	Supported

***significant at 0.001 level (Two-tailed)

Table 5 presents the results of hypothesis testing for direct effects, showing that all three hypothesized relationships are statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) and supported, with substantial R^2 values indicating strong explanatory power for employee engagement and organizational Identification.

Hypothesis Testing for Indirect Effect

Because a significant direct effect of CSR perception on employee engagement (EE) was observed, organizational Identification was added to the model as a mediating variable. A bootstrapped model (2000 samples, 95% confidence interval) was used to test the indirect effect of organizational Identification. All regression paths were statistically significant with organizational Identification as a mediator (Table 6). Furthermore, the indirect impact of CSR perception on EE through organizational Identification was significant and positive ($\beta = 0.275$, $p = 0.000$, $LL = 0.170$, $UL = 0.421$), with the confidence interval not containing zero (Table 7). As both direct and indirect effects were significant, a partial mediation model was confirmed in this study. Thus, organizational Identification partially mediates the relationship between CSR attitude and EE.

Table 6. Regression path in the mediation model

Regression path	Estimate	S.E.	CR.	p value	Remarks
CSR Perception → Organizational Trust	.603	.077	8.270	***	Significant
Organizational trust → Employee engagement	.456	.057	6.267	***	Significant
Corporate social responsibility → Employee engagement	.490	.064	6.337	***	Significant

***significant at 0.001 level (Two-tailed)

Table 6 presents the regression paths in the mediation model, indicating that all tested paths are statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), supporting the mediating role of organizational trust between CSR perception and employee engagement.

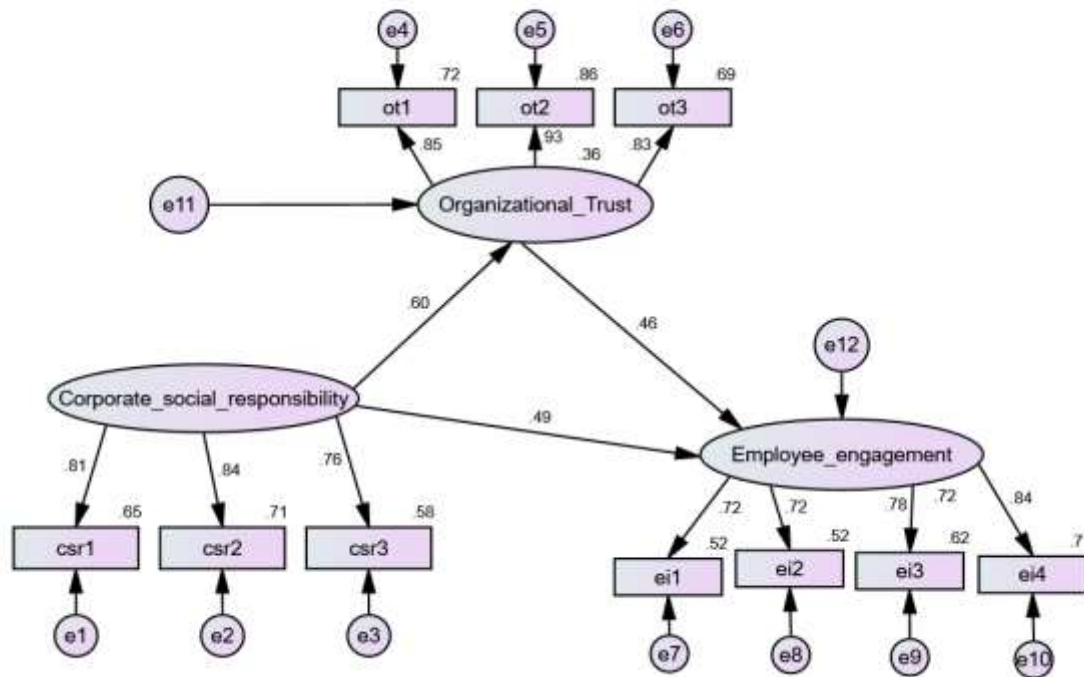


Figure 3. Standardized regression paths in the presence of organizational trust as a mediator

Figure 3 illustrates the Standardized Regression Paths, Showing That Corporate Social Responsibility Positively Influences Employee Engagement Both Directly and Indirectly Through Organizational Trust, Confirming Its Mediating Role.

Table 7. Hypothesis testing for indirect effect based on Bootstrapping

Regression path		95% Bootstrap Confidence Interval			P-Value
		Lower Limit	Upper limit		
CSR Perception → Organizational Trust → Employee Engagement	Total Effect	.765	.620	.885	0.001
	Direct effect	.490	.285	.662	0.001
	Indirect Effect	.275	.170	.421	0.000

Table 7 shows that both the direct and indirect effects of CSR perception on employee engagement through organizational trust are statistically significant, confirming a significant mediation effect as supported by the bootstrapped confidence intervals and p-values.

DISCUSSIONS

Research examining the impact of university CSR initiatives and policies on faculty perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors is scarce. This study contributes to the literature by addressing this gap and demonstrating the significant influence of perceived CSR initiatives on employee engagement (EE) and organizational trust (OT). The findings reaffirm previous studies that have shown a positive link between CSR and employee attitudes (Chaudhary, 2017; Manimegalai & Baral, 2018), particularly regarding employee engagement (Chaudhary, 2017; Lin, 2010) and organizational trust (Kazmi & Abbas, 2021; Lee et al., 2012). By extending this research into the context of higher education, this study provides a novel perspective on how CSR perceptions shape faculty engagement and trust in academic institutions.

This study offers several important contributions. First, it highlights the role of CSR as a strategic tool for enhancing faculty engagement in business schools, demonstrating that CSR initiatives impact not only corporate employees but also academic professionals. Faculty members, unlike their corporate counterparts, often perceive CSR through the lens of ethical responsibility and societal impact. The results suggest that CSR initiatives can elevate employees' sense of purpose at work, catalyzing engagement (Aguinis & Glavas, 2017). These initiatives foster pride, teamwork, and skill development, ultimately contributing to overall well-being, as evidenced by a recent study on Chinese university teachers (Che et al., 2025).

Second, the study reinforces the crucial mediating role of OT in linking CSR perceptions to employee engagement (EE). The findings indicate that OT significantly predicts EE, aligning with prior research showing that trust enhances engagement and motivates employees to reciprocate with improved performance (Saks, 2006). Furthermore, integrating CSR into an institution's decision-making processes cultivates trust among faculty, as observed in corporate settings (J. Park et al., 2014). The results build upon previous studies (Chowdhury et al., 2024; J. Park et al., 2014; Pivato et al., 2008) by confirming that CSR initiatives have a positive influence on OT in the academic environment.

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the impact of CSR perceptions on employee engagement (EE) through organizational trust (OT) as a mediator. The results confirm that OT partially mediates the relationship between CSR and EE, emphasizing the importance of trust in institutional CSR efforts. CSR initiatives convey positive signals about an organization's values, increasing trust and cultivating greater engagement (Rupp et al., 2006). As a bridge between CSR perceptions and behavioral outcomes, OT helps employees develop confidence in institutional values and goals, ultimately enhancing their commitment and engagement (Colquitt et al., 2007).

Overall, this study contributes to the discourse on corporate social responsibility (CSR) in higher education institutions, offering valuable insights for administrators, policymakers, and educators. It underscores the importance of cultivating trust through CSR initiatives to enhance faculty engagement and strengthen institutional commitment. Future research can build on these findings by exploring additional factors that influence faculty engagement, such as leadership support and institutional culture, further enriching the understanding of CSR's role in academia.

CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to examine how business school faculty members' perceptions of corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives influence their organizational trust and employee engagement within the context of Nepal's higher education institutions. Given the diversity among societies, universities and their faculties possess different abilities to address CSR challenges across cultures. Nepal, as an underdeveloped nation, has universities and faculties equipped with the necessary abilities, analytical skills, knowledge, and decision-making capabilities to advance societal goals and contribute to a better world. These universities and colleges play a crucial role in promoting sustainable economic development by fostering connections between corporations and society, ultimately benefiting the nation as a whole. This is a cross-sectional study, and these results should be interpreted with caution regarding causality. Long-term studies are necessary for more definitive conclusions.

This study builds on the understanding of CSR by utilizing social identity and social exchange theory to explain how the B-school faculty's perception of CSR initiatives influences employee engagement. The study underscores the notion that CSR is not just an external corporate function but an important internal function that helps organizational commitment and trust. This study contributes to the literature on human resource management by identifying CSR as a strategic resource that yields positive outcomes within organizations. These findings contribute to the resource-based view by identifying CSR initiatives that generate trust as an intangible resource, thereby increasing university or college performance. This study also advances the discourse on corporate social responsibility (CSR) in higher education institutions (HEIs) by demonstrating how CSR initiatives impact faculty outcomes.

Based on the frameworks of SIT and SET, this study contributes to the existing literature on CSR and human resources. To understand the relationship between corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives and employee behavior, stakeholders should implement regular CSR-related programs in universities and colleges to assess their impact on employees' work behavior and satisfaction. CSR should be integrated into universities' core values and daily operations. This enables management to tailor and enhance CSR initiatives to meet employee expectations and bring greater loyalty. They should increase their investment in CSR initiatives to enhance faculty engagement and trust in higher education institutions (HEIs). Universities can incentivize faculty members to be involved in CSR initiatives that promote social impact. Universities should design CSR-based faculty development programs to cultivate socially responsible teaching. Regulators can enforce these CSR initiatives by mandating CSR in the accreditation process and establishing a funding

mechanism in research and academia that supports socially responsible business practices. This research should inspire senior management in universities and colleges to adopt CSR initiatives, thereby achieving positive work outcomes for employees. This holds particular significance for underdeveloped economies like Nepal, where the notion of university social responsibility is still in its initial stages and is rarely discussed. Sustainable campus practices, such as waste reduction programs and the ethical sourcing of materials, can be implemented on the premises to set an example for students.

The scope of this study was limited to business school faculty. This decreases the ability to generalize the results across Nepal's higher education institutions (HEIs) and limits the diversity of perspectives. Other schools and departments within the universities may have varying levels of CSR awareness and institutional support. This study considers CSR a one-dimensional construct and does not differentiate between its internal and external aspects. Future research should explore these dual dimensions of CSR and examine their impact on outcome variables. The use of qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews, could offer deeper insights into the perspectives of CSR that may not be well captured through quantitative methods. The use of a Western scale to measure CSR is another limitation. Moving forward, looking for alternative CSR dynamics in Nepal's context is crucial. Studies using self-report measures often contain an inherent common method bias. Since the perception and attitudes of CSR differ across industries, further research can be conducted in other industries or within other departments of universities or colleges. The study could also employ cross-country comparisons to identify differences in faculty perceptions among regions, thereby gaining a better understanding of global variations. To see the evolution of CSR perceptions over time, longitudinal studies can be equally helpful.

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