

Enhancing firm performance and growth through corporate social responsibility

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Abstract

Purpose: This study explains how employees' perceptions of corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives influence firm performance and firm growth, via stakeholder-oriented commitment mechanisms and strategic CSR outcomes. It examines the influence of four CSR-related factors— obligation to society, obligation to customers and markets, obligation to natural environment, and economic benefit in CSR—on stakeholder relationship commitment and authentic stakeholder commitment. These commitments are assumed to impact strategic CSR satisfaction and durability, which in turn affect firm performance and growth.

Design/methodology/approach: Data from 411 employees in CSR-active firms in Ho Chi Minh City were analyzed using PLS-SEM (SmartPLS 4; 5,000 bootstrap resamples). The paper fills a gap in the literature by considering employee perceptions along with CSR strategy and long-term performance, specifically in an emerging economy.

Findings: CSR priorities toward customers/markets, the natural environment, and perceived economic value strengthen both stakeholder relationship commitment and authentic stakeholder commitment. In contrast, perceived obligation to society does not significantly predict authentic stakeholder commitment. These commitments enhance strategic CSR satisfaction and strategic CSR durability, which improve firm performance and growth.

Research limitations/implications: The convenience sample restricts the generalizability of findings, and the sample did not include different industries and regions. Only those firms actively engaging in CSR were included, which may overlook perspectives from firms at an incipient stage of CSR implementation. The sample was concentrated within a few industries, which restricts the generalizability of results to other industries.

Social Implications: The study highlights the importance of integrating CSR initiatives and considering employee perspectives to improve business performance and promote sustainable development. It determines which dimensions of CSR most strongly facilitate stakeholder involvement and trust, with a keen realization of the importance accorded by employees to perpetual sustainable development. The results from this study offer pragmatic inspiration for industry practitioners and policymakers on operationalizing CSR as a guiding principle for sustainability in emerging markets.

Originality/value: The study (i) conceptualizes CSR priorities at the employee-perception level instead of as a uniform action and (ii) separates relationship commitment from authentic stakeholder commitment as different mechanisms linking CSR to strategic CSR outcomes and firm performance. The results indicate that CSR authenticity in emerging institutional contexts depends on internal institutionalization rather than symbolic compliance, contributing to the symbolic–substantive CSR debate.

Keywords: Corporate social responsibility, Employee perceptions, Stakeholder commitment, Perceived CSR authenticity, Strategic CSR, Firm performance, Firm growth

Jel Codes: M00, M10, M14

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1. Introduction

Firms increasingly face pressure to strengthen their social responsibility (Maheshwari et al., 2024), but most organizations find it difficult to turn corporate social responsibility (CSR) intentions into actual, sustainable performance improvements. This may be because CSR is largely conceptualized at the firm level, while the employee interpretative processes that are critical for any kind of stakeholder engagement remain vastly undertheorized.

CSR is a complex concept, with varying definitions across stakeholders and institutional contexts. It can be generally defined as a management philosophy that seeks to minimize the harmful external effects of corporate activities on stakeholders, society, and the environment, potentially adding positive value or benefits instead (Licandro et al., 2023). CSR is operationalized as employee-perceived priority domains (e.g., society, customers/markets, natural environment, economic value), aligning the content of CSR with employees' sensemaking (Fordham & Robinson, 2018).

Beyond product quality, CSR can shape stakeholder trust and employee commitment, influencing firm performance. It is therefore crucial for businesses to integrate CSR elements into their strategic methods (Marakova et al., 2021). Companies around the world face the challenge of presenting corporate responsibility in a socially responsible way (Mai et al., 2023), with many choosing to adopt management practices that achieve social value and economic benefits and promote sustainable development (Chang & Yoo, 2023). Most research on CSR perceives it as a homogeneous corporate action without considering that such actions are construed and enacted through employees' cognitive and affective assessments. It is this perception that forms their trust, involvement, or commitment to stakeholder relationships.

As a strategic business domain, CSR is increasingly recognized for its contributions to sustainable development (Ye et al., 2020), and is considered a determinant of a firm's sustainable performance maximization (Ngo & Le, 2023). Organizations are incorporating CSR activities as a means of strengthening stakeholder relationships (Pfajfar et al., 2022). Integrating CSR into organizational strategies not only allows firms to give back to the environment and their communities but also helps build a brand image and eventually achieve success.

Because CSR resources are limited, it is important to understand how CSR initiatives can achieve maximum efficiency and effectiveness in meeting continuously growing social demands (Barnett et al., 2020). Successful CSR activities require the effective management of both internal and external relationships within the firm. Amidst globalization and myriad environmental issues, stakeholders are displaying greater interest in how businesses conduct themselves and fulfill their responsibilities toward the environment and society to promote sustainable development (Gunawan et al., 2020; Ngo & Le, 2023; Singh & Misra, 2021). Mutual obligations and expectations make the relationship between enterprises and stakeholders both complex and fragile.

There are several key gaps remaining in the literature. First, most extant literature in the field homogenizes CSR as a uniform organizational action, without considering how employees interpret CSR priorities and convert them into stakeholder-oriented commitment. Second, the internal mechanism between perceptions of CSR and long-lasting, strategic outcomes of CSR remains unclear, requiring further exploration. Finally, there is scant evidence from emerging economies explaining the contexts in which firms may construe CSR as symbolic compliance instead of authentic commitment to stakeholder relationships. As such, this study is guided by the

following research question: How do employee-perceived CSR priorities translate into firm performance and firm growth through commitment mechanisms and strategic CSR outcomes in an emerging economy?

This study aims to investigate how different dimensions of CSR—social, customer/market, environmental, and economic obligations, impact firm performance and sustainable development through stakeholder relationship commitment and strategic CSR engagement from the perception of employees. Based on Carroll's (1991) conceptualization of CSR and Freeman's (1984) stakeholder theory, this research develops a structural model for identifying the internal mechanism through which CSR fuels long-term sustainability at the enterprise level. Therefore, this research makes three contributions to CSR scholarship. First, it elaborates a micro-level account of CSR effectiveness by demonstrating how and why employee perceived CSR priorities are associated with different commitment mechanisms. Second, it distinguishes reciprocity-based and authenticity-driven stakeholder commitment and explicates two pathways through which CSR links to strategic outcomes. Third, drawing from an emerging economy context, it demonstrates that CSR practices of different 'types' exhibit varying capacity to elicit authentic engagement and thus contribute to the symbolic–substantive CSR debate.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Theoretical Foundation

Sustainability vision theory emphasizes the prioritization of different stakeholder interests to achieve long-term satisfaction and sustainable results (Kantabutra, 2020). CSR helps influence the relationship between companies and stakeholders who respond positively by reinforcing firms' social legitimacy (Gunawan et al., 2020). In developing economies like Vietnam, where institutional trust and social expectation are still emerging, CSR is used as a strategic tool for balancing economic development with social and environmental responsibilities (Ngo & Le, 2023).

Carroll (1979, 1991) proposed a four-dimensional framework of responsibilities that firms have in addressing the interests and expectations of their stakeholders: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic. It is within these dimensions that organizations frame sustainability management, corporate citizenship, and community involvement at the local level. The conceptualization of CSR has drastically transformed over time to become an integral aspect of contemporary business ethics and corporate governance (Ashurov et al., 2024). Carroll (2016) further developed his theory on how companies can be involved both locally and globally.

According to Freeman (1984), firms create value when they recognize and responsibly manage the relationships with all groups that are affected by their activities. CSR plays a key role in relationship strength and reputation building, eventually providing a pathway toward sustainable performance. In recent decades, CSR has garnered significant interest from scholars in the field of management (Brin & Nehme, 2019). The impact of CSR initiatives differs between companies (Karagiannopoulou et al., 2023). A comprehensive approach to CSR has had a significant impact on how companies approach sustainability, corporate citizenship, and their role within local communities and the global context.

2.2. Obligation to Society and Stakeholder Relationship Commitment

The significant element of examining relational benefits lies in how companies actively engage through interconnected systems, aiming to boost loyalty within relationships by fostering commitment (Gundlach et al., 1995). CSR refers to a company's responsibilities to society or, more precisely, its stakeholders, those impacted by its policies and actions (Hanzaee & Rahpeima, 2013). CSR is based on the idea that organizations have a moral and ethical obligation to have a positive social impact in addition to pursuing their financial interests (Carroll, 2016). There is a positive correlation between CSR and relationship quality (Aljarah et al., 2018). Relationship commitment reflects an obligation founded on the principle of reciprocity (Gundlach et al., 1995). True commitment goes deeper: it is intrinsically motivated and based on internal values (Kim & Lee, 2022). Companies feel pressured to meet consumers' sustainability and ethics expectations because their competitors do so. Firms are increasingly expected to be transparent in their reporting and conduct business in an eco-friendly way.

Developing CSR is essential in today's complex corporate landscape (Loor-Zambrano et al., 2022), but it is one of the most dynamic and challenging areas of corporate practice (Karagiannopoulou et al., 2023). Once primarily associated with philanthropic activities, CSR is now seen as an innovative management strategy that can not only

improve corporate profitability but also contribute to overall societal well-being. Committed workers understand their responsibility in helping achieve specific goals within a team. They not only perform their duties well, but also positively influence their colleagues to help the organization reach its objectives (Harter et al., 2002). When CSR initiatives align with societal expectations, stakeholders perceive them as authentic, facilitating long-term relational engagement.

While relationship commitment is based on reciprocity and exchange obligations (Gundlach et al., 1995), authentic commitment embodies intrinsic value alignment (Kim & Lee, 2022). These mechanisms may part ways when they see CSR as an instrumental rather than a value-driven act. Where CSR initiatives find alignment with societal expectations, stakeholders ascribe meaningfulness, thereby orienting themselves on the path toward long-term relational engagement. However, this sense of obligation to society may be misconceived as externally driven compliance and therefore may not generate authentic acts of commitment from stakeholders where the underlying institutional pressures are nascent. Based on the analysis above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Obligation to society positively influences stakeholder relationship commitment in CSR practices.

H2: Obligation to society positively influences authentic stakeholder commitment in CSR practices.

2.3. Obligation to Customers and Markets

Zheng, Huang, and Zhang (2019) argued that for firms operating in emerging markets, CSR represents a strategic option that can be used to both build reputation and achieve legitimacy in dynamic and heterogeneous environments. The implementation of CSR practices is influenced by both changing social expectations and structural flaws within the market system (Newman et al., 2020). The role of businesses in society has changed significantly in recent decades, transitioning from a focus solely on generating profits to also returning part of those profits to society. Customer- and market-oriented CSR requires companies to act in an ethical manner, safeguard consumer welfare, practice a pro-social lifestyle, and provide safe, high-quality products through transparent marketing activities that address consumer concerns and build trust.

Enterprises are impacted by variations in culture, political structures, and ethical perspectives across different contexts and markets. These factors shape how companies perceive and approach CSR and its societal effects. Consequently, fostering strong relationships is vital for navigating diverse environments with multiple stakeholders (Pfajfar et al., 2022). When stakeholders establish an emotional bond with a company due to its CSR efforts, they experience psychological advantages that bolster relational commitment and nurture long-term loyalty. When CSR initiatives are perceived as authentic, they have a greater positive psychological impact among stakeholders, fostering satisfaction and trust. Through showcasing sincerity and ethical principles, authenticity of commitment strengthens relational ties, generating advocacy and loyalty among stakeholders. Based on the analysis above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3: Obligation to customers and markets positively influences stakeholder relationship commitment.

H4: Obligation to customers and markets positively influences authentic stakeholder commitment.

2.4. Obligation to the Natural Environment

As external CSR efforts grow, there is a corresponding increase in resource allocation. Employees tend to perceive companies that invest substantial resources in such programs despite budget limitations as genuinely committed to CSR. This heightened authenticity fosters the development of an ideal self-image, positive views of corporate values, and emotional connection to the company among employees (Kim & Lee, 2022). Industries that deal with environmental pollution and social issues should fulfill their corporate social responsibilities based on ethical requirements and practical needs (Dela et al., 2024). Corporate responsibility to the natural environment requires not only reducing negative impacts on the environment, but also actively promoting ecologically sustainable development.

Davies et al. (2019) explained that tackling issues associated with climate change and environmental shifts demands that corporations, as pivotal economic agents, take on the duty of protecting the environment. Enterprises should proactively implement environmental management practices and bolster their sustainability

initiatives by decreasing their impact on the environment. Such dedication will lead to positive, enduring outcomes within their operational structures (Abubakar et al., 2022). CSR strategies should incorporate environmental concerns within business activities and consider the benefits of environmental protection.

CSR affects a diverse array of stakeholders, including employees who are critical to a company's success. Employees may view CSR as a direct reflection of the company's values and beliefs, including its ethical stance (Kim & Lee, 2022). CSR directly affects a company's financial performance, and the better the company's environmental, social, and governance (ESG) values, the stronger this effect is (Coelho et al., 2023). Strategic CSR initiatives can be deliberately integrated into a company's operations with the aim of tackling societal and environmental challenges while also yielding financial benefits. Based on the analysis above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H5: Obligation to the natural environment positively influences stakeholder relationship commitment.

H6: Obligation to the natural environment positively influences authentic stakeholder commitment.

2.5. Economic Benefits of CSR

It is undeniable that CSR is of great importance to stakeholders, the environment, and society as a whole (Hakim et al., 2023). In modern business, CSR is increasingly seen as a key driver of economic development and social progress (Ashurov et al., 2024; Sharma et al., 2025). Companies engage in CSR activities not only for philanthropic purposes, but also to gain potential economic benefits, such as increased customer loyalty, enhanced brand awareness, access to new markets, reduced operating costs through improved efficiency, and attracting and retaining top talent.

Soewarno et al. (2021) explained that CSR yields a favorable and considerable effect on corporate performance because implementing CSR initiatives can integrate responsible practices into corporate culture and improve the overall work environment. For companies seeking to incorporate social responsibility into their business strategies, the interaction between economic benefits, relationship commitment, authenticity, and strategic CSR efforts is crucial. Economic gains, such as cost efficiency and enhanced brand perception, are driving forces behind CSR involvement. These economic motives may enhance the perceived authenticity of CSR initiatives; thus, this study tests whether perceived economic value predicts authentic stakeholder commitment in this context. While an emphasis on economic benefits can drive CSR engagement, too great a focus on economic returns can cause stakeholders to doubt motives. Here we ask a related empirical question: does perceived economic value enhance or detract from genuine stakeholder commitment. Based on the analysis above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H7: Economic benefits positively influence stakeholder relationship commitment.

H8: Economic benefits positively influence authentic stakeholder commitment.

2.6. Relationship Commitment, Strategic CSR Satisfaction, and Durability

Commitment to stakeholder relationships in CSR practices (CSRe) is a relationship commitment based on obligation and reciprocity, whereas authentic commitment to stakeholder relationships in CSR practices (ACS) captures the value-driven, intrinsically motivated commitment, or genuine stakeholder engagement. An understanding of how relationship commitment, satisfaction with strategic CSR, and resilience or sustainability intertwine to bring about effective implementation of CSR initiatives is vital. Testa et al. (2018) reported a positive correlation between CSR and employee commitment. Studies on employee behavior and CSR have suggested that implementing CSR initiatives can enhance employees' connections with their organizations (Ali et al., 2010), which can, in turn, play a crucial role in organizational success.

Employee engagement describes the degree to which employees identify with and are committed to the organization at which they work (Mowday et al., 1979). Long-term growth can only be achieved through a comprehensive approach to sustainable development that balances social and environmental factors with economic needs (Din et al., 2025). Relational commitment signifies an organization's devotion to its stakeholders, including employees, while CSR satisfaction gauges the extent to which stakeholders perceive CSR efforts as meeting their expectations. A positive relational commitment fosters positive interactions with

stakeholders and enhances CSR satisfaction. In turn, bolstering stakeholder loyalty, trust, and support enhances the sustainability of CSR endeavors from the enterprises. Based on the analysis above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H9: Stakeholder relationship commitment positively influences strategic CSR satisfaction.

H10: Stakeholder relationship commitment positively influences strategic CSR durability.

2.7. Authentic Stakeholder Commitment, CSR Satisfaction, and Durability

The authenticity of CSR within an organization can be understood as encompassing socially and culturally defined responsibilities, including the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary obligations of a company. When all these responsibilities are met, a company's CSR efforts are more likely to be perceived as genuine and sincere (Kim & Lee, 2022). Authentic commitment embodies the sincere integration of CSR within a company's ethos and operations, fostering more meaningful initiatives that resonate with its fundamental values. This dedication serves as the cornerstone for strategic CSR satisfaction, where companies evaluate the efficacy of their CSR endeavors in meeting both business objectives and stakeholder expectations.

Authentic stakeholder commitment reflects employees' perceptions that stakeholder engagement is grounded in genuine organizational values rather than symbolic compliance. Similarly, CSR authenticity refers to the recognition of CSR activities as authentic corporate beliefs and actions that are intended to benefit society and go beyond mere legal obligations. Integrating CSR strategies into internal business processes can bring significant benefits, such as enhancing corporate reputation, employee engagement, and sustainable economic growth (Chipriyanov et al., 2024). Strategic CSR durability refers to the long-term sustainability and resilience of CSR initiatives. Companies with a robust authenticity commitment are more inclined to invest in enduring CSR strategies that nurture trust and continuity within stakeholder relationships. The positive correlation between strategic CSR satisfaction and durability suggests that companies that are satisfied with their CSR outcomes are more likely to maintain their initiatives over time, thereby ensuring their enduring impact. Based on the analysis above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H11: Authentic stakeholder commitment positively influences strategic CSR satisfaction.

H12: Authentic stakeholder commitment positively influences strategic CSR durability.

2.8. Strategic CSR, Durability, and Firm Performance

The growing interest in CSR is based not only on ethical principles but also on its practical benefits, such as improving operational efficiency and promoting a fairer and more inclusive business environment. Effective implementation of CSR initiatives requires adjustments to both organizational structure and corporate culture, emphasizing the value of practicing ethical behavior and social responsibility in daily business activities (Chipriyanov et al., 2024). Corporate success is closely related to CSR performance, especially in terms of strategic CSR and CSR satisfaction. This implies that one of the two relationship states is essential for strategic CSR satisfaction, a state in which a company's CSR program is well embedded within its mainstream value-creation process. It depends on factors such as compatibility with and perceived effect on the corporate image. Durability is conceptualized as perceived strategic embeddedness rather than realized long-term outcomes. Strategic CSR durability reflects employees' perceptions of the institutionalization and long-term embeddedness of CSR within firm strategy.

When companies implement CSR programs within their communities, they make a significant contribution to local development (Abebe-Mamo et al., 2024). Investments in CSR enhance corporate credibility and customer trust by increasing satisfaction, thereby improving long-term strategic CSR satisfaction. While short-term CSR programs can help companies achieve initial success, they ignore the slower returns that come from investing in long-term CSR programs. Firms should understand the intricate relationships between success factors if they are to leverage CSR to achieve long-term goals. Based on the analysis above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H13: Strategic CSR satisfaction positively influences firm performance.

H14: Strategic CSR durability positively influences firm performance.

2.9. Firm Performance and Growth

Enterprises use CSR as a means to fulfill their social responsibilities while balancing performance and long-term profitability (Chang & Yoo, 2023). Economic development plays an important role in determining the impact of economic conditions on CSR practices (Guo & Yang, 2023). Since sustainable practices can improve enterprise efficiency across multiple dimensions, there is a mutually beneficial relationship between sustainable expansion and corporate performance. Sustained growth over time requires maintaining balance among the economy, society, and environment.

To move beyond short-term profitability and achieve economic, environmental, and social sustainability, companies should now prioritize sustainable development approaches (Phan et al., 2020). However, it remains crucial to establish an appropriate classification system for its various forms and applications (Khan et al., 2023). Companies implementing CSR within their communities make a significant contribution to promoting sustainable development (Abebe-Mamo et al., 2024). Many industries have adopted specific sustainability measures to meet the particular challenges and opportunities they face regarding sustainable development. Because these measures reflect industries taking responsibility for the environment and society, they demonstrate that industries understand the meaning behind operationalizing sustainable practices (Roffé & González, 2024). Following the implementation of CSR practices, firm performance may improve as a consequence of reduced costs, greater access to new markets, and the attraction of investors interested in the firm's growth. Based on the analysis above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H15: Firm performance positively influences firm growth.

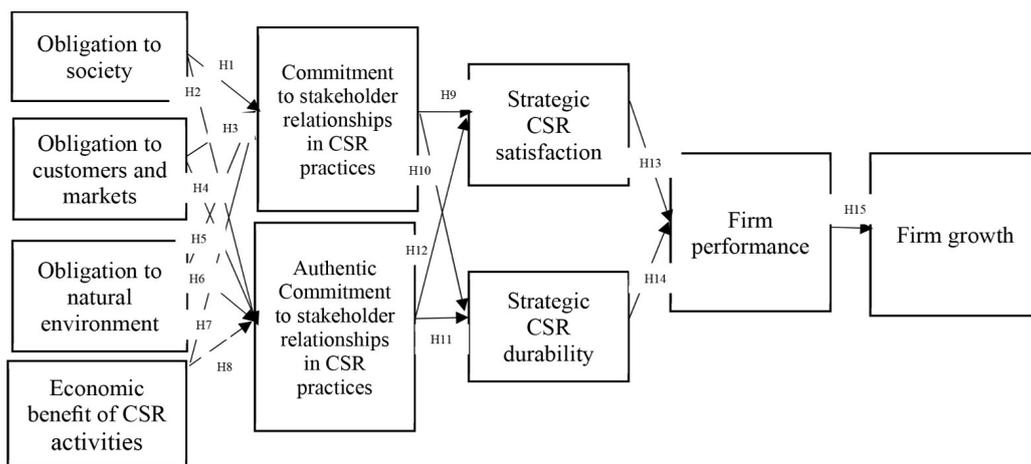


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of this study

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Theoretical Linkage

This study adopted a quantitative research design based on the sustainable development vision theory and the CSR strategic framework, drawing on key concepts from existing CSR literature to explore how different dimensions of CSR shape employee perceptions and influence sustainable development outcomes at the firm level. According to Hanzae and Rahpeima (2013), CSR can be quantified through scales. Doing so allows public perceptions to be measured in numeric terms, making results more informative, comparative, and conducive to monitoring CSR performance over time. This helps companies be aware of public views and enables the adjustment of CSR strategies to better meet social expectations.

3.2. Sample Selection and Data Collection

This study aimed to explore employees' perceptions of CSR activities and their impact on company performance and sustainable development. A structured questionnaire was used to survey employees (ranging from lower-level employees to directors) of companies that actively implement CSR activities in Ho Chi Minh

City (HCMC), Vietnam. Participants were deemed eligible if they (1) were currently working in a company with identifiable CSR activities and (2) participated in or were aware of the implementation of CSR within the company. These criteria ensured data quality by targeting informed respondents, but may limit the generalizability of the results. Using a non-probability convenience sampling approach, the study obtained 411 valid observations.

Upon collecting the samples, a data cleaning process was conducted to eliminate unsuitable samples, such as those with missing information or poorly answered surveys, from the data analysis. SPSS was utilized for descriptive statistics, and SmartPLS for structural equation modeling analysis.

3.3. Instrumentation and Measures

The constructs in this study include items adapted from previous research as well as new items developed by the authors. The adapted items follow well-established frameworks for measuring CSR (e.g., Devinney et al., 2010; Hanzaee & Rahpeima, 2013; Phan et al., 2020). The new items developed for this study were created to capture context-specific aspects of CSR engagement, stakeholder commitment, and strategy in CSR. They were based on CSR theory and stakeholder theory, and were developed through consultation with experts to ensure content validity. Firm performance and firm growth were measured using employees' perceived evaluations of organizational outcomes rather than objective financial indicators. This approach was appropriate given employees' limited access to verified accounting data and is widely adopted in CSR and organizational behavior research. Table 1 presents all items used in the survey, as well as their source.

Item Code	Descriptions	Adapted/adopted from sources
	Obligation to society (OTS)	
OTS1	My firm cooperates with other private and public entities in social responsibility projects	Hanzaee and Rahpeima (2013)
OTS2	My firm emphasizes the importance of its social responsibilities to the society	
OTS3	My firm targets sustainable development and creation of a better life for future generations	
OTS4	My firm seeks opportunities to define projects that are beneficial both for the organization and society	
	Obligation to customers and markets (OCM)	
OCM1	My firm considers both customer satisfaction and his/her long-term benefits in its plans and actions	Hanzaee and Rahpeima (2013)
OCM2	My firm has enough disclosure about its products and services to customers.	
OCM3	My firm respects customer rights while also considering other stakeholders' rights	
OCM4	My firm tries to implement local and international standards in its production	
	Obligation to natural environment (ONE)	
ONE1	My firm participates in activities which aim to protect and improve the natural environment	ONE1 & ONE2: Hanzaee and Rahpeima (2013); ONE3: Developed for this study
ONE2	My firm tries to minimize its unfavorable and damaging effects on the natural environment	
ONE3	My firm uses environmentally friendly materials or processes in its operations	
	Economic benefit in CSR activities (ECB)	
ECB1	Engaging in CSR activities can increase sales by enhancing customer trust	Developed for this study
ECB2	Developing CSR policies helps businesses attract socially invested capital at lower interest rates, reducing financial costs	
ECB3	Implementing social programs reduces advertising and marketing expenses by increasing brand awareness	
ECB4	Businesses benefit from engaging in CSR by attracting and retaining talented employees, reducing training and turnover costs	
ECB5	Participating in social activities creates direct and indirect benefits, enhancing business stability and reducing reputation risks	

Item Code	Descriptions	Adapted/adopted from sources
	Commitment to stakeholder relationships in CSR practices (CSRe)	
CSRe1	In my company, maintaining strong relationships with stakeholders is regarded as essential to our CSR efforts.	Developed for this study
CSRe2	Cultivating and nurturing strong ties with stakeholders stands as a pivotal element in the triumph of CSR approaches	
CSRe3	Strong bonds with stakeholders not only enrich the community but also play a pivotal role in generating value for businesses	
CSRe4	Companies recognize that acknowledging and meeting stakeholders' needs forms the bedrock for establishing a sustainable business landscape	
CSRe5	Therefore, prioritizing stakeholders is essential for impactful and purposeful CSR endeavors	
	Authentic commitment to stakeholder relationships in CSR practices (ACS)	
ACS1	In my company, stakeholder engagement in CSR reflects genuine organizational values rather than mere compliance with external pressures.	Developed for this study
ACS2	Employees in my company perceive CSR-related stakeholder engagement as sincere and oriented toward long-term commitment.	
ACS3	My company engages stakeholders in CSR through practices that are transparent and foster trust.	
ACS4	In my company, stakeholder concerns are prioritized in CSR decisions, even when doing so requires organizational trade-offs.	
ACS5	In my company, stakeholder feedback is meaningfully integrated into CSR-related decision-making.	
	Strategic CSR satisfaction (SCS)	
SCS1	The success of CSR strategy reflects the positive connection between businesses and communities through the impact and support of the enterprise	Developed for this study
SCS2	Evaluating satisfaction with CSR determines the establishment and maintenance of relationships with customers and communities, reinforcing trust and commitment	
SCS3	Businesses successful with CSR attract and retain talent more easily, contributing to enhancing human resources	
SCS4	Satisfaction with CSR creates value for both the community and the business, promoting sustainable development and building a positive image	
SCS5	An effective CSR strategy yields high satisfaction from shareholders and investors, recognizing the long-term value of social and environmental management	
	Strategic CSR durability (SCD)	
SCD1	CSR programs are usually applied in strategic business management within firms	Developed for this study
SCD2	A durable CSR plan should be incorporated across all business dimensions, encompassing evaluation of its effects on the environment, society, and economy	
SCD3	The dedication of upper management is pivotal. Routine evaluations are necessary to guarantee alignment with strategic objectives and community requirements	
SCD4	A robust and ongoing communication strategy is vital for addressing issues and elucidating the significance of CSR	
SCD5	Embedding CSR within the business strategy is not merely a passing fad but an indispensable component for the company's enduring viability and prosperity	
	Firm performance (FIP)	
FIP1	Employees perceive that the firm's profit margin has improved in recent years	Devinney et al. (2010)
FIP2	Employees perceive that returns to shareholders are satisfactory relative to key competitors	
FIP3	Employees perceive that the firm utilizes its assets effectively compared to industry norms	
FIP4	Employees perceive that the firm effectively employs capital to support sustained performance	

Item Code	Descriptions	Adapted/adopted from sources
FIP5	Employees perceive that the firm maintains healthy cash flow relative to its operating revenue	
FIP6	Employees perceive that sales performance generates adequate returns for the firm	
FIP7	Employees perceive that the firm's market value has improved over time	
FIP8	Employees perceive that overall shareholder returns reflect positive firm performance	
	Firm growth (FIG)	
FIG1	Employees perceive that the firm's assets have grown steadily over recent years	
FIG2	Employees perceive that the firm's net revenue has increased over time	
FIG3	Employees perceive that the firm's profit after tax shows positive growth	
FIG4	Employees perceive that the firm's market share has expanded	Phan et al. (2020)
FIG5	Employees perceive that the firm has experienced growth in its workforce	

Table 1. Construction and items of this study

3.4. Data Treatment and Analytical Procedure

Given the exploratory nature of this study and the complexity of the proposed model (including multiple latent structures and mediating variables), partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was used for data analysis. Initially, 430 completed questionnaires were collected. During the data-cleaning stage, responses with substantial missing data, uniform response patterns (i.e., straight-lining), or clearly inconsistent answers were removed. This procedure led to the exclusion of 19 observations, yielding a final dataset of 411 valid responses for analysis. The cleaning process focused on eliminating low-quality cases rather than substantively altering the composition of the sample, and the final sample size remained adequate for PLS-SEM.

First, the construct reliability and validity of the measurement model were assessed. All indicator loadings were above 0.70, while composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) reached the generally accepted thresholds of 0.70 and 0.50, respectively. The heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) ratio was used to confirm discriminant validity, revealing that there were significant differences between individual constructs.

Next, the structural model was evaluated to test the hypotheses. Bootstrapping was performed with 5,000 resamples to assess the significance of path coefficients, indirect effects, and mediation relationships. All variance inflation factor (VIF) values were below the acceptable threshold of 3.3, indicating that multicollinearity is not a concern. This comprehensive approach enabled a robust assessment of the model.

As shown in Table 2, 53.5% of respondents were female, 42.8% were male, and 3.6% identified as other. A standard four-level organizational hierarchy—specialist/executive, team leader, middle manager, and director—was used to classify respondents based on job responsibilities. This hierarchy corresponds to widely accepted management classifications, facilitating consistency and replication in other studies. Based on this classification, 39.7% of participants were executives or specialists, 26.8% were team leaders, 22.4% were middle managers, and 11.2% were directors. Most participants held a bachelor's degree (59.1%), followed by master's degrees (20.7%), diplomas (11.4%), and doctoral degrees (8.8%). As for the company activity period, 51.6% worked in companies operating for 3–5 years, 29.0% for less than 3 years, and 19.5% for 5 years or more.

3.5. Assessment of Common Method Bias

Given that all constructs were self-reported measures assessed at a single time point, the possibility of common method bias (CMB) being a factor was considered. Following best practices in PLS-SEM, full collinearity VIFs were examined. The largest values were far below the conservative cutoff of 3.3, suggesting that common method variance did not pose a serious concern.

In addition to statistical assessment, procedural safeguards were put in place during questionnaire design, including guaranteeing respondent anonymity and lowering evaluation apprehension to reduce the likelihood of systematic response bias.

Demographic profile	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	176	42.8	42.8	42.8
Female	220	53.5	53.5	96.4
Other	15	3.6	3.6	100.0
Total	411	100.0	100.0	
Working position				
Executives/specialists	163	39.7	39.7	39.7
Team leaders	110	26.8	26.8	66.4
Middle managers	92	22.4	22.4	88.8
Directors	46	11.2	11.2	100.0
Total	411	100.0	100.0	
Qualifications				
Diploma	47	11.4	11.4	11.4
Bachelor's degree	243	59.1	59.1	70.6
Master's degree	85	20.7	20.7	91.2
Doctoral degree	36	8.8	8.8	100.0
Total	411	100.0	100.0	
Company Activity Period				
Less than 3 years	119	29.0	29.0	29.0
3–5 years	212	51.6	51.6	80.5
5 years or longer	80	19.5	19.5	100.0
Total	411	100.0	100.0	

Table 2. Demographic profile

4. Findings

The constructs measured in this study included *obligation to society (OTS)*, *obligation to customers and markets (OCM)*, *obligation to natural environment (ONE)*, *economic benefit in CSR activities (ECB)*, *commitment to stakeholder relationships in CSR practices (CSRe)*, *authentic commitment to stakeholder relationships in CSR practices (ACS)*, *strategic CSR satisfaction (SCS)*, *strategic CSR durability (SCD)*, *firm performance (FIP)*, *firm growth (FIG)*.

Table 3 shows the results of the analyses for internal consistency and convergent validity. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.790 to 0.919, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. The reliability of the measures was supported by the rho_A values (0.790–0.922) and CR (rho_C) values (0.877–0.934), which were above 0.70 for all constructs. AVE values ranged from 0.638 to 0.704, higher than the criterion of 0.50, supporting convergent validity.

Variables	Cronbach's alpha	rho_A	Composite reliability (CR; rho_C)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
ACS	0.884	0.886	0.915	0.684
CSRe	0.872	0.873	0.907	0.661
ECB	0.866	0.870	0.903	0.651
FIP	0.919	0.922	0.934	0.638
FIG	0.878	0.883	0.911	0.672
OCM	0.836	0.838	0.890	0.670
ONE	0.790	0.790	0.877	0.704
OTS	0.828	0.832	0.886	0.659
SCD	0.860	0.861	0.900	0.642
SCS	0.876	0.877	0.910	0.669

Table 3. Construct Reliability and Validity

Table 4 displays the HTMT ratios used to assess discriminant validity among the constructs. All HTMT values were below the threshold of 0.85, indicating acceptable discriminant validity across the constructs. The highest observed HTMT value was between CSRe and SCD (0.628), which was well below the threshold value. These results confirm that the constructs are empirically distinct from one another and suitable for further structural equation modeling.

Variables	ACS	CSRe	ECB	FIP	FIG	OCM	ONE	OTS	SCD
ACS									
CSRe	0.376								
ECB	0.627	0.323							
FIP	0.246	0.266	0.21						
FIG	0.162	0.125	0.167	0.677					
OCM	0.404	0.578	0.25	0.204	0.058				
ONE	0.459	0.580	0.352	0.173	0.045	0.386			
OTS	0.259	0.524	0.178	0.133	0.072	0.413	0.283		
SCD	0.466	0.628	0.3	0.530	0.341	0.406	0.411	0.337	
SCS	0.562	0.473	0.45	0.471	0.301	0.291	0.328	0.238	0.472

Table 4. The heterotrait–monotrait ratio of correlations

Table 5 summarizes the results of the structural model analysis, including the estimated path coefficients (β), sample means, standard deviations, t -statistics, and p -values. The majority of the hypothesized relationships are statistically significant at the .05 level, with the exception of the path from *OTS* to *ACS* ($\beta = 0.056$, $t = 1.122$, $p = .262$). Specifically, the path from *ECB* to *ACS* shows a strong positive influence ($\beta = 0.454$, $t = 9.512$, $p < .001$), as does the path from *ECB* to *CSRe* ($\beta = 0.094$, $t = 2.021$, $p = .043$), although the latter effect is relatively weaker. *OCM* significantly influences both *ACS* ($\beta = 0.174$, $t = 3.723$, $p < .001$) and *CSRe* ($\beta = 0.288$, $t = 7.299$, $p < .001$). Similarly, *ONE* significantly contributes to both *ACS* ($\beta = 0.184$, $t = 3.566$, $p < .001$) and *CSRe* ($\beta = 0.302$, $t = 6.794$, $p < .001$).

Paths	Beta (β)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
ACS -> SCD	0.256	0.257	0.047	5.485	0.000
ACS -> SCS	0.403	0.404	0.041	9.707	0.000
CSRe -> SCD	0.462	0.463	0.042	10.883	0.000
CSRe -> SCS	0.283	0.282	0.047	6.072	0.000
ECB -> ACS	0.454	0.456	0.048	9.512	0.000
ECB -> CSRe	0.094	0.092	0.047	2.021	0.043
FIP -> FIG	0.613	0.614	0.042	14.551	0.000
OCM -> ACS	0.174	0.175	0.047	3.723	0.000
OCM -> CSRe	0.288	0.288	0.040	7.299	0.000
ONE -> ACS	0.184	0.183	0.052	3.566	0.000
ONE -> CSRe	0.302	0.303	0.044	6.794	0.000
OTS -> ACS	0.056	0.056	0.050	1.122	0.262
OTS -> CSRe	0.263	0.265	0.042	6.215	0.000
SCD -> FIP	0.360	0.360	0.045	7.921	0.000
SCS -> FIP	0.280	0.281	0.046	6.128	0.000

Table 5. Mean, STDEV, T-Values, P-Values

Additionally, *CSRe* has a strong positive effect on *SCD* ($\beta = 0.462, t = 10.883, p < .001$) and *SCS* ($\beta = 0.283, t = 6.072, p < .001$). *ACS* has a significant effect on both *SCD* ($\beta = 0.256, t = 5.485, p < .001$) and *SCS* ($\beta = 0.403, t = 9.707, p < 0.001$). Both *SCD* and *SCS* strongly impact *FIP* ($\beta = 0.360, t = 7.921, p < .001$; $\beta = 0.280, t = 6.128, p < .001$). Finally, *FIP* is a significant determinant of *FIG* ($\beta = 0.613, t = 14.551, p < .001$). Overall, the model demonstrates strong explanatory power with most paths being statistically significant.

Table 6 displays the inner VIF values for the structural model. All VIF values are far below the conservative threshold of 3.3, indicating there is no issue of multicollinearity in the model. The predictors *ACS* and *CSRe* (*ECB*, *OCM*, *ONE*, and *OTS*) have VIFs ranging from 1.116 to 1.230. Both *ACS* and *CSRe*—when used to predict *SCS* and *SCD*, respectively—have a VIF of 1.123, which means there is no collinearity between these two commitment mechanisms. The predictors of firm performance (*SCS* and *SCD*) have VIF values of 1.204, while the path from *FIP* to *FIG* has a VIF of 1.000. These low VIFs mean that the estimated path coefficients can be considered very stable, with a negligible possibility that they are biased due to multicollinearity.

	ACS	CSRe	ECB	FIP	FIG	OCM	ONE	OTS	SCD	SCS
ACS									1.123	1.123
CSRe									1.123	1.123
ECB	1.116	1.116								
FIP					1.000					
FIG										
OCM	1.23	1.23								
ONE	1.195	1.195								
OTS	1.159	1.159								
SCD				1.204						
SCS				1.204						

Table 6. Inner VIF Values

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The structural model results show that 14 of the 15 hypotheses depicted in the conceptual model in Figure 1 were supported by strong empirical evidence. The only unsupported path was *OTS* → *ACS*. Obligations to customers/markets, the natural environment, and perceived economic value substantially supported both commitment mechanisms (H3–H8), while obligation to society only supported relationship commitment but not authentic stakeholder commitment (H1 supported; H2 not supported). Authentic and strategic CSR stakeholder-oriented commitments had very strong positive effects on both satisfaction and durability of strategic CSR (H9–H12). These benefits firmly enhance firm performance (H13–14), which thereafter drives firm growth (H15). The results statistically confirm the important role stakeholder-oriented CSR commitments play in developing firm-level strategic CSR mechanisms that improve performance and growth.

Responsible corporate behavior can be assessed by examining philanthropic activities from the perspective of the beneficiaries (Singh & Sharma, 2024). The analysis in this study shows a statistically significant, positive effect on authentic commitment to stakeholder relationships in CSR for all proposed relationships except for obligation to society, implying that societal obligation alone may not be sufficient to generate authentic stakeholder commitment. This finding provides important strategic implications for the design of CSR initiatives. The non-significant effect of societal obligation on authentic stakeholder commitment also implies that philanthropic intention alone may not generate deep relational engagement with stakeholders. The difference between an obligation stemming from societal factors and one arising from internal values is often lost, particularly in nascent institutional environments. Where firms face tight constraints of legitimacy, employees may consider the practice of philanthropy, or trying to implement socially-oriented CSR to be mainly reactive or symbolic, thus undermining true stakeholder commitment that requires authentic engagement with societal issues. In transitional economies such as Vietnam, societal obligation may be perceived as symbolic compliance rather than a driver of authentic CSR, a phenomenon previously discussed in institutional theory.

This study adds new dimensions to the CSR literature by identifying the strategic relevance of employee commitment and empirically explaining how different dimensions of CSR can lead to firm outcomes. These findings have practical implications for business leaders and policymakers working to improve sustainability through socially responsible efforts.

The difference between dimensions indicates that authenticity is not a product of the ethical intent behind any one initiative, but of the extent to which CSR is embedded in organizational systems and routines. Employees judge authenticity based on whether CSR is ingrained in procedures, managerial practices and performance metrics.

CSR areas that are closely tied to core business functions and that impact customers and the market or that are related to environmental management, are often embedded through routinized procedures and quantifiable targets. Because they are part of everyday activity and are measured, employees are likely to see further signs of consistencies between professed values and actual behavior, thus reducing internal decoupling and further reinforcing stakeholder legitimacy.

In contrast, social responsibility operates at a sociopolitical level. In rising economies undergoing institutional reforms, firms face significant legitimacy constraints. Philanthropic or community social responsibility initiatives may therefore be adopted tactically and for external legitimacy. Employees may view these initiatives as compliance oriented, rather than deriving intrinsically. When CSR appears symbolically to be aligned with external expectations and not substantively fit to routines, authentic commitment will not develop.

These findings provide a forward-looking direction for stakeholder theory by considering an institutional lens for understanding CSR authenticity. Internal stakeholders query CSR not on the basis of what is said but rather by understanding the extent of institutional harmony across identity, governance, and actual practice. Our findings also contribute to the symbolic–substantive CSR debate, indicating that the symbolic arises from institutional decoupling, particularly in nascent contexts where formal CSR is conceptually adopted ahead of its workings.

First, companies that actively engage in CSR and support their employees, customers, and communities tend to receive more positive evaluations (Pandit, 2023). The relationship between obligation to society, commitment to stakeholder relationships, and authenticity in CSR practices is crucial for Vietnamese enterprises aiming for sustainable development. Social responsibility represents the ill-defined, interconnected, and large-scale environmental and social issues that a company has an obligation to tackle.

Second, the relationship between an organization and its stakeholders is often complex and nuanced, characterized by mutual accountability and shared expectations. CSR initiatives bridge the gap between stakeholder benefits and market or consumer demands. When companies place an emphasis on their customers and evolve with market trends by coordinating their CSR initiatives, they usually form stronger ties with stakeholders. True commitment between stakeholders and the organizations in meeting responsibilities should not only be reactive action, but should also include proactive initiatives that address social, environmental, and economic issues affecting different sectors. Companies can build brand reputation, generate loyalty, and create responsibility by recognizing these commitments within their CSR programs.

Third, a holistic approach to sustainable development is essential, as it ensures that social and environmental dimensions are integrated with economic goals to promote long-term growth (Din et al., 2025). To enhance their CSR strategic practices, Vietnamese businesses should aim to strike a balance between their environmental responsibility and stakeholder commitment. Companies should manage sustainable development in their main activities by implementing green practices such as reducing emissions and using renewable sources of energy. These practices will not only meet their environmental responsibilities but will also make firms more credible.

Fourth, CSR is increasingly important in modern business practices due to its potential to promote economic growth (Sharma et al., 2025). Vietnamese enterprises should combine economic value with CSR commitments. CSR activities should be designed to be consistent with both stakeholder expectations and corporate goals. Integrating CSR activities into regular business operations allows businesses to increase profitability while

helping resolve social and environmental problems. Sustainable supply chain initiatives, for example, can meet the desires of eco-conscious consumers while also cutting costs. That is done through real stakeholder engagement, where a company shows a true interest in understanding stakeholders' concerns by working together to develop sustainable solutions that build loyalty and trust.

Economic value derived from CSR should not necessarily be interpreted as opportunistic profit seeking but rather as a signal that CSR is strategically integrated and supported by routine organizational practices. When trust-building yields reputational durability and stability within stakeholder relationships, the economic benefits of CSR initiatives can be explicitly acknowledged. Such acknowledgment permits employees to expect the continuity of such initiatives over time and enables the development of true commitment by stakeholders.

Finally, sustainable development aims not only to meet current needs and interests, but also to ensure that the needs of future generations are adequately met (Purnamawati et al., 2023). Because firm performance is a key determinant of firm growth, sustainability should be integrated into business activities to improve corporate performance, thus ensuring the continued and sustainable growth of enterprises in HCMC. National and international legal frameworks should encourage businesses to institute results-oriented environmental systems. Only when energy-efficient technology is combined with responsible resource management can costs be cut and environmental impact reduced. CSR initiatives that enhance brand image include volunteerism and ethical labor standards. Companies need to invest in sustainable supply chains and green innovation to meet the growing consumer demand for eco-friendly products.

6. Theoretical Implications

The present study challenges the all-encompassing premise within CSR research that to contribute to authentic stakeholder commitment, all CSR dimensions should contribute equally. The findings reveal that CSR categories differ in their potential to foster authenticity in proportion to their institutional embeddedness and strategic integration at the level of organization. By placing the emphasis on the actual internalization of CSR initiatives by the employees, rather than on the moral imperative behind it, the study redefines authenticity as a product of institutional alignment rather than stated intent, thereby nudging CSR scholarship away from the tendency to view CSR domains as homogenous and towards a more detailed micro-level analysis of how employees conceive of and justify corporate responsibility within new institutional settings.

The study makes several important theoretical contributions to the literature on CSR. First, by explicitly framing the analysis within Carroll's (1979, 1991, 2016) four-dimensional model of CSR, this study empirically demonstrates that obligations toward customers, markets, the environment, and economic value are more influenced by employee-driven commitment mechanisms than societal responsibilities at large. This finding is congruent with previous evidence that while employees are generally receptive to concrete CSR initiatives closely linked to their professional roles, actions of a wider societal scope tend to be perceived as symbolic or undertaken primarily for legitimacy (Newman et al., 2020). The results of this study show that societal obligations do not significantly predict authentic stakeholder commitment, adding conceptual depth to the ongoing symbolic–substantive CSR discourse.

Second, the study extends stakeholder theory by demonstrating that employees, usually undervalued as internal stakeholders, play a vital interpretative role in how CSR initiatives are translated into organizational outcomes. Previous literature has widely emphasized stakeholder expectations and corporate response (Freeman, 1984), with little emphasis on internal relational mechanisms. The current study distinguishes between relational commitment and authentic stakeholder commitment to offer a more nuanced understanding of how employees internalize and respond to CSR initiatives, extending relational commitment theory.

Finally, this study offers empirical support for a comprehensive model that connects strategic CSR outcomes and overall firm performance with the shared perceptions of CSR responsibilities by employees. The distinction between general commitment and authentic stakeholder commitment to stakeholder relationships, which are revealed to have mediating roles in strategic CSR satisfaction and long-term effectiveness, represents a key contribution. Though most dimensions of CSR create authentic stakeholder commitment, the societal dimension does not, thereby providing counterintuitive evidence that CSR perceptions by employees vary with context. This

insight provides a more fine-grained understanding of how internal stakeholders affect the strategic value of CSR initiatives.

7. Practical Implications

The study offers several practical implications that organizations can implement beyond their normal CSR activities. Implementing CSR programs in enterprises in HCMC is largely a matter of managerial discretion and internal motivation, unlike more developed contexts where CSR frameworks are institutionalized and regulated externally. Because employees' perceptions determine whether CSR initiatives lead to strategic organizational benefits or not, it is clear that while CSR has usually been considered an externally oriented corporate strategy, there is also an internally driven mechanism shaped by employees.

CSR policies should be articulated and communicated to employees in terms that appeal to their cognitive and emotional assessment, rather than as regulations or disclosure requirements with which companies should comply. This is particularly important in a transitional market, like Vietnam, because CSR is seen as symbolic or compulsory unless real organizational intention is expressed through action. Authentic stakeholder commitment, not mere involvement, is an internal driver of the effective implementation of CSR at all levels within firms operating under evolving institutional contexts.

Managerially, the results suggest that CSR should be implemented by involving employees and not imposing it as a top-down mandate. Aligning CSR outcomes with employees' perceptions can prevent misalignment between strategic purpose and execution. Continuous training practices generate authenticity in training delivery and build employee trust, which increases engagement and supports the long-term sustainability of CSR programs.

This study leads to a novel understanding that CSR successes in emerging economies are dependent on internalization and legitimization by employees, not just well-structured strategies. This is unlike economically developed settings, where CSR processes are externally embedded.

8. Conclusions

This study empirically examined the influence of employees' perceptions of CSR activities on firm performance and growth. Data from 411 employees from firms active in CSR in HCMC revealed positive relationships between CSR obligations to consumers, the market, environment, and economic value and both commitment and authentic commitment to stakeholder relations. This latter association enhances strategic CSR satisfaction and durability, leading to improved firm outcomes. Of particular interest is the finding that the obligation to society does not significantly affect authentic stakeholder commitment, suggesting that the dimensions of CSR resonate differently with employees.

The research goes beyond empirical validation to create a better understanding of CSR theory through a model that not only distinguishes between types of commitment, but also traces their effects on outcomes at strategic and performance levels. It also provides practical insights for firms seeking to align their CSR efforts based on employee perceptions, helping them move beyond mere formal compliance toward authentic engagement to create value and support sustainability in the long run. Lastly, the results position employees' sensemaking processes as a crucial micro-foundation of CSR effectiveness and emphasize that the strategic value of CSR hinges on the specific CSR priorities that employees perceive as credible, meaningful, and enduring.

9. Limitations of the Study and Directions for Future Research

Several caveats should be taken into account when considering the insights generated in this study. First, the use of convenience sampling limits the generalizability of the findings. The results may not be generalizable to a broader workforce in different industries. Second, the sample size, though adequate for PLS-SEM, is still relatively small, especially given the diversity of CSR practices and organizational characteristics within and across different sectors and regions. A larger, more diverse sample would allow for more in-depth subgroup analyses and strengthen the statistical validity of the results. Third, the study focused on companies with well-established CSR initiatives. Excluding firms at the initial phases of CSR integration, or where concrete results from these actions have not yet been realized, may have biased the results. Finally, the study is narrow in

terms of industry representation, with most participants drawn from only a few sectors, so the results found may not be applicable to businesses in other, underrepresented, or emerging industries.

Future research should take a more robust sampling approach, such as random or stratified sampling, to achieve better representation. Including more industries and regions would further strengthen the validity of the conclusions and provide a fuller picture of the relationship between CSR and firm performance and sustainability. Finally, including more variables, such as employee engagement, organizational culture, or leadership styles, may lend further support to the pathways through which CSR leads to long-term organizational performance.

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Authors' contributions

The author confirms sole responsibility for the following: study conception and design, data collection, analysis and interpretation of results, and manuscript preparation.

Data availability

Data are not publicly available due to confidentiality concerns but are available from the author upon reasonable request.

Use of Artificial Intelligence

The author used AI-assisted tools (e.g., ChatGPT) solely for language editing and clarity improvement. No AI tools were used to generate data, analysis, or results. No AI-generated code or synthetic data were used in this study. All intellectual content, analysis, and conclusions were developed by the author in accordance with responsible research practices.

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