

# Is CSR a Hygiene Factor for Prospective Employees? An Indian Exploration

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*Western research has validated the attractiveness of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) for the prospective employees while making a job choice. The phenomenon has been rarely explored in the Indian context. Interviews were taken from graduating Master of Business Administration (MBA) students from a top business school in the country. The interviews explored the importance of CSR for the prospective employees while making a job choice. The inquiry further extended to uncover the importance of CSR for brand image and other attractive features of an organization. It was found that CSR is not more than a hygiene factor for the prospective employees, which is in contrast to the Western context.*

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## Introduction

The importance of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is growing since the last two decades (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Lu & Liu, 2014). Prior studies suggest the positive impact of CSR on the firm's financial performance (Margolis & Walsh, 2003; Bihari & Pradhan, 2011), firm value (Harjoto & Jo, 2011). Besides financial performance, it has positive linkages with several other metrics such as buying behavior (Becker-Olsen, Cudmore & Hill, 2006), loyalty (Marin, Ruiz, & Rubio, 2009) and trust among the customers and other stakeholders (Sagar & Singla, 2004; Castaldo et al. 2009). The enhancement in competitive advantage by virtue of CSR activities has also been suggested not only for large firms but for SMEs as well (Nair & Sodhi, 2012; Torugsa, O'Donohue, & Hecker 2012).

Western literature also studied the impact of CSR and its attractiveness to the prospective employees while making a job choice decision (Turban & Greening, 1997; Albinger & Freeman 2000). On the other hand there remains a dearth of literature studying prospective employees in the ambit of CSR in the Indian context

(Sharma, Sharma & Devi, 2009). Further, Aguinis & Glavas (2012) have also suggested the need for future research linking CSR and prospective employees in various contexts.

The absence of literature in the Indian context on prospective employees and CSR generates a need to assess the impact of CSR on the prospective employees. The Company Act 2013, which mandated 2% compulsory CSR spending for business houses (The Companies Act, 2013:135), has led to an increased discussion on CSR in India's media. Hence, it becomes relevant to study the perception of prospective employees on CSR.

Furthering the scope of our study we also felt a need to assess the perception of prospective employees on gauging the impact of CSR on the brand of the organization and explore certain other attractive features of an organization while making a job choice. In this study, we tried to answer these questions through 15 interviews with the graduating students of Master of Business Administration (MBA) from Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad (India). We now proceed to the conceptual framework section of the article.

### Conceptual Framework

CSR, also known as Corporate Citizenship, is defined by Maignan & Ferrell (2000:284) as "*The extent to which businesses meet the economic, legal, ethical and discretionary responsibilities imposed on them by their*

*stakeholders*". European Commission's (2001:8) has defined CSR as "*A concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis*". Nair & Sodhi (2012) has defined CSR as a corporate self-regulation which is integrated into the business model of a firm.

Western literature has explored the positive linkage between CSR and prospective employees while making a job choice (Turban & Greening, 1997; Albinger & Freeman, 2000; Jones et al., 2010). These studies claim that prospective employees are attracted towards organizations which are high on CSR front. The underlying theory of this attraction towards CSR is attributed to signaling theory and social identification theory. Organizations through their socially responsible actions give a signal to the prospective employees about the possible treatment towards them by the organizations in the future.

Studies on CSR and prospective employees are present in the Western context, but the studies are almost non-existent in the Asian context. There are few studies on current employees highlighting the importance of CSR for employees in Chinese context (Ramamany, Yeung & Yuan, 2008; Zhu, Hang, Liu & Lai, 2014), leaving scope to study the importance of CSR for prospective employees in the Asian context. Based on prior literature of West, we propose that prospective employees will be attracted by the CSR activities of a firm while mak-

ing a job choice in the Indian context as well.

Proposition 1: CSR is perceived as an attractive feature while making a job choice by the prospective employees in India.

Past literature from the West reveals that job, career opportunities, culture, and pay are important attractive features of an organization (Dubin, Champoux & Porter, 1975). Harpaz (1990) found that good pay and interesting work are two prime attractive features for employees across the world, independent of age, gender, and organizational level. Provision of challenging role, good pay and career incentives have been linked negatively to intent to leave (Hsu, Jiang, Klein & Tang, 2003) and positively related to organizational commitment (Lineberry & Trumble, 2000). Thus, we propose that role, career opportunities and compensation will be some of the other attractive features for prospective employees while making a job choice in the Indian context as well.

Proposition 2a: Role offered in the organization is an attractive feature for prospective employees.

Proposition 2b: Career opportunities offered in the organizations are an attractive feature for prospective employees.

Proposition 2c: Compensation offered in the organization is an attractive feature for prospective employees.

The advantage of CSR has also been addressed on the brand of the firm as

well. Brand is “A name, term, sign, symbol or design, or combination of them which is intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors” (Kotler, 1991:442). Thus, we can infer that brand is something unique which distinguishes a firm from the others and promises to deliver the goods or services of certain qualities with certainty. Prior literature suggests that CSR has direct positive effects on brand value (Middlemiss, 2003; He & Li, 2011). CSR not only enhances the brand value but also serves the purpose of brand insurance (Werther Jr. & Chandler, 2005). Bihari & Pradhan (2011) have also reported a positive image creation and goodwill generation by virtue of the CSR activities. Thus, we propose that CSR activities will create a positive impact on the brand of the firm.

**CSR not only enhances the brand value but also serves the purpose of brand insurance.**

Proposition 3: CSR activities of a firm will generate a positive impact on the brand of the firm.

### **Methodology**

To explore the informants’ responses on CSR and its attractiveness for the prospective employees, we conducted 15 interviews of graduating students of Master of Business Administration (MBA) from Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad (IIMA). This institute was chosen for the study because it is

considered as the incubation center for preparing top class prospective management employees in the country. Almost every student of IIMA has a choice while accepting a job, as they get more than one offer. This Institute is the number one Business College in India. Its two-year MBA program has been ranked 16<sup>th</sup> globally, by the Financial Times in 2014, and ranked number one nationally, by Business World and Outlook (Rankings at a glance, n.d).

Since our research question was rarely explored in the Eastern world, es-

pecially in India, we chose an inductive method for our study. Fredrickson (1986) has suggested that interviews are one of the best tools to develop rich and clear understanding about the variables used in this exploratory study. In accordance with the prior researches, we chose random sampling for the interviews. The respondents were randomly selected for the purpose. The respondents included twelve Indians and three foreign national students who were in the final year of the MBA program of the institute. The details of the sample are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1 Demography of the Sample.**

Sample Size	Age (Years)	Work Experience (Years)	Indian Students	Foreign Students	Female Students	Male Students	Engineering Background
15	20-28	0-6	12	3	3	12	10

Note: Engineering background is the stream of education during under graduation.

The interview questionnaire was based on the Corporate Citizenship Scale developed by (Maignan & Ferrell, 2000). Expert comments by three professors of IIMA were also incorporated while framing the questions to serve the purpose of the study. The interviews were conducted with the informed consent of the respondents and ranged from 55minutes to 20 minutes. We stopped after fifteen interviews because a repetitive pattern started emerging in the responses of the informants after 10 interviews.

The interview questions were anchored around five themes basically: (a) understanding of CSR, (b) importance of CSR for prospective employees, (c) impact of CSR on brand image, (d) top most

priority of the graduating students while making a job choice, (e) some other features on which the attractiveness of an employer depends on while making a job choice decision.

Informants were mostly asked open-ended questions so that rich data could be obtained. A few follow-up questions were also asked to the prospective employees to generate a detailed description about their observations or ideas (Anselm & Corbin, 1998).

**Analysis**

Each interview was recorded, and personal notes were simultaneously prepared to obtain a holistic view of the con-

versation while conducting the interviews (Strauss, 1987). Some internet sources and online documents were also searched to maximize the validity and reliability of the interview results. The internet materials and other secondary sources of information triangulated our findings (Yin, 2003).

The tape-recorded interviews were transcribed into a word document- a transcript as suggested by (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Then secondary sources were utilized as part of the analytic process. We marked the relevant texts and assigned some key words; these key words were the initial concepts. Through marking keywords, different themes and sub-themes were generated. There were certain pre-existing codes emerging out during the retrieval process and a few new codes were emerging. The newkeywords which were emerging were classified under the inductive identification as they were grounded in the respondent's own interests and the way of thinking. As we went on analyzing the interview data, some concepts suggested by past research were confirmed. Further iteration of data also revealed the same set of concepts (Suddaby, 2006).

Lastly outsider perspective was also taken to appraise our ideas and establish interpretive validity. Doctoral students of the same institute were involved in the discussion to exchange their views on the emerging patterns, evolving concepts and the processes involved in the method (Corley & Gioia, 2004). The analysis and retrieval of the transcripts reveal the following findings:

### **Understanding of CSR**

According to the informants, CSR canvassed the following:

“CSR is providing social goods like education and employment to the society members, dwelling in the nearby areas of the firm.”

“CSR is more than the legal requirement to gain visibility, covering issues beyond core competencies.”

**The majority of the informants (86.66%) did not include responsibility towards employees under the CSR umbrella.**

These definitions were in accordance with Carroll (1991); McWilliams & Siegel (2001). It was interesting to note that the majority of the informants (86.66%) did not include responsibility towards employees under the CSR umbrella. According to them CSR is responsibility towards society only. Many respondents suggested that if responsibility towards employees were involved in CSR, organizations will report the money spent on employee welfare as money spent on CSR, thus nullifying the 2% spending mandated by The Companies Act (2013: 135).

Some other responses of the informants on understanding of CSR were in line with the definition of CSR proposed by Porter & Kramer (2006); Lantos (2001). Similar to Nair & Sodhi (2012) we also offer that CSR is imbibed in the

business model itself and is for the mutual benefit of the firm as well as the society in the long run. The below quote from one of the informants also illustrates the same notion.

“According to me CSR is more built into the business model.”

Some of the informants believed that CSR is a tool to compensate the negative externalities produced by the firm.

“I think CSR definition can vary from industry to industry but for me CSR is an activity wherein the firm tries to compensate to the society for any negative externalities they have created for business.”

The primary outcomes derived from the interviews on the topic related to CSR gives a clear indication that the majority of the informants consider CSR to include voluntary services for the general benefit of the people. Employee welfare was usually excluded from the ambit of CSR.

### **Attractiveness for Prospective Employees**

The perspective of the prospective employees on the importance of CSR as an attractive feature was not more than a hygiene factor. Amidst the host of options (compensation offered, career opportunities, industry, working conditions, professional approach and CSR) provided, the informants rated CSR at the lowest in attractiveness parameters for the prospective employees. Informants

were equivocal that CSR does add to the firm's brand image and enhances its attractiveness, but the impact is not so tangible. Although the informants were also unanimous that for short term job, better package is important but for long term career a firm driven by ethics and grounded in good CSR may offer safe and comfortable working conditions.

**For long term career a firm driven by ethics and grounded in good CSR may offer safe and comfortable working conditions.**

It is apparent that CSR may be a hygiene factor, and it is not among the top most attractive features of an organization. Informants gave more importance to compensation and career opportunities than CSR while deciding an organization to work with. This can be observed in the excerpts from one of the interviews.

“CSR actually does not add much value to the fresh graduate going into the corporate, as it is not impacting him directly. If he or she has some social inclination, then probably yes. In the initial stage students do not go for CSR, for example, there is TATA Rallis which is known for its CSR activities, but does not offer a competitive package, so students do not opt for it, they go for Syngenta or firms like that, which offer a higher package”.

### **Brand Image of a Firm**

Informants unanimously revealed that brand is paramount for prospective

employees, especially in the beginning of the career. These responses were consistent with prior research (Kuchеров & Zavyalova, 2012; Jiang & Iles, 2011, Mandhanya & Shah, 2010). Informants believed that a strong brand assures better working conditions, legal compliance, and ethical outlook. It not only develops goodwill and reputation but also ensures excellent career opportunities in the future for

the employees. Some of the responses generated from the informants are:

“Brand image of a firm is very important; it will help me in building my career, it fulfills all the criterion of an employee.”

A list of the attributes associated with a strong brand is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2 Meaning of Brand for Prospective Employees**

	Brand	
Career Opportunity	Famous	Identity
Trust	Reputation	Reliable
Respect	Differentiator	Good Image

Informants unanimously agreed that CSR does add value to the brand, which was in line with the prior research (Poolthong & Mandhachitara, 2009; Ogrizek, 2002). CSR activities bring positive attitude and respect among the customers towards the brand because of the noble purpose served by it. People do develop respect and trust organizations which are good on CSR front; at the same time, it was also revealed by the informants that the CSR does not counter-balance the inefficiency of the product. Interestingly, respondents were also unanimous that not all kinds of CSR add to the brand. Rather it is the type of CSR, and the manner in which it is performed that creates value for the brand. One of the informants states the importance of CSR to the brand in the following way:

“CSR may or may not add to the brand. It depends on the way the firm operates its CSR activities”.

**Decision-Making Feature**

Under this broad theme, respondents talked about various essential elements which were at the top priority while choosing an organization to work for. The answers included compensation, pay, package, brand of the company, industry they are in, sector they are in, fast moving industry, role offered, job profile, career opportunity, perception among alumni, working conditions, cultural fit, freedom and autonomy.

“For me it is the meaningfulness of the work which matters.”

These words are of one of the informants, indicating a role offered to him or her as the most attracting factor while making a job choice.

Depending on the concepts inferred by a word, few words were grouped in one primary category, for example, pay,

package, compensation referred to the same concept, the fixed monetary entitlements offered in exchange for the job done. Thus, these were clubbed together under the category of compensation.

Similarly, words like sector, industry, fast moving industry were clubbed under the primary category of industry they are in. The detailed responses of the informants are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3 Top-most Attracting Features While Choosing an Organization to Work for**

Top most priority Keywords derived during the Interviews	Main Category of the Keywords	Percentage of Total population
Role offered, Job profile, Role, freedom and autonomy	Role	26.66 %
Industry, sector, Fast moving industry	Industry	20 %
Brand, company name	Brand	13.33 %
Package, pay, compensation	Compensation	13.33 %
Working conditions, Cultural fit	Culture	13.33%
Career opportunities	Career	6.6%
Perception among alumni	Word of mouth	6.6%

**Other Attractive Features of an Organization**

While inquiring about some other attractive features of an organization, respondents revealed the following responses: pay package, growth, brand, career opportunities, working conditions, culture, feedback from seniors, location of organization, industry they are in, ease of switching options, professional approach to business. A respondent reveals his preference order about the attractiveness of a firm in this way:

“For me brand and package are top two criteria and then comes the role which closely follows the first two and everything else comes after that.”

**Compensation was rated among the top three attractive factors by 66.67% of the respondents.**

Out of all these responses, compensation was rated among the top three attractive factors by 66.67% of the respondents. Role was rated by 60%, and ca-

**Table 4 Top Three Attractive Features of an Organization While Choosing a Job**

Top three attractive features of an organization while making a job choice. Keywords derived during the Interviews	Main Category of the Keywords	Percentage of Total respondents
Pay, package, compensation, salary	Compensation	66.67%
Role, profile, meaningfulness of work, position, autonomy	Role	60%
Growth, Growth path, career opportunities, career path	Career opportunities	53.33%
Industry, sector, fast growing industry	Industry	40%
Brand, name of the company	Brand	26.66%
Location	Location	6.66%
Feedback from the seniors	Word of mouth	6.66%

reer opportunities were rated among top three attractive features of a firm by 53.33% of the respondents.

### **Discussion & Conclusion**

In this study, we tried to investigate the importance of CSR as an attractive feature for prospective employees. We also attempted to find some other attractive features for prospective employees of an organization while making a job choice. We found that CSR was rated not more than a hygiene factor by the prospective employees while making an organizational job choice. The responses of the three foreign students were in accordance with the Indian students on the importance of CSR. Role, compensation, industry of operation, career opportunity, and culture were rated above CSR. Some of the respondents even informed that CSR is no longer an attractive and differentiating factor in Indian context because it has been a mandatory phenomenon for the business houses from 2013 (The Companies Act, 2013: 2013: 135). These findings were in contrast to the prior Western works of Turban & Greening (1997) and Albinger & Freeman (2000).

**CSR, which is an attractive feature for prospective employees in the West, is not attractive to the prospective employees in India.**

This emerging pattern about the CSR by the prospective employees definitely rings a bell in the ears of the employers, policy makers and researchers. It is re-

ally interesting to note that CSR, which is an attractive feature for prospective employees in the West, is not attractive to the prospective employees in India; it is not more than a hygiene factor. Thus, our expectation that CSR is an attractive feature for the prospective employees was not strengthened. Our findings also reveal that prospective employees do not give an exhaustive search to find the CSR activities of a firm.

On the other hand role offered, compensation, culture of an organization was among the top three attractive features of an organization for prospective employees while making a job choice in an organization. These findings were consistent with the findings of (Harpaz, 1990). Harpaz had also identified pay, role and career incentives as attractive features of a job offer. Thus, our results extend the generalization of prior researches of West in Asian context.

We postulate that some probable reasons for this kind of responses towards the CSR in Indian context can be mainly due to: (a) liability for repayment of the study loan ranging from USD 24000, (b) increase in consumerist culture and (c) CSR becoming a mandatory affair for all the firms in India, thus losing its differentiating feature.

The informants unanimously accepted that CSR activities feed into the brand of a firm. All the students were equivocal that CSR activities develop a positive attitude and respect among the customers towards the brand because of the noble purpose served by it.

This study contributes to the prospective employee literature on CSR. The findings suggest that CSR may not be a differentiating factor for attracting skilled and highly educated graduating students in Indian context. Role, career opportunities and culture of an organization, are among the three most attractive features to attract talent. Our findings become significant because with the growing war for talent all over the world (Beechler & Woodward, 2009) organizations need to develop strategies that make them more attractive to the prospective employees. They also need to retrospect and design future CSR plans that are impactful.

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