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Assessing the Impact of Socially Responsible Business Practices on Employer Brand Image: A Study of Generation Z Talent Perceptions

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Abstract

As Gen Z is about to enter the workforce in large numbers, organizations are reevaluating their employer branding strategies in order to align with Socially Responsible Business Practices (SRBP) which mainly include Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). This quantitative study aims to investigate the impact of DEI and CSR efforts on the Employer Brand Image (EBI) among Generation Z graduates of business schools in Pakistan. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using multi-linear regression to assess the relationship between these variables. The results indicate that for Gen Zs, both DEI and CSR significantly contribute to a stronger employer brand image, however, DEI emerges as a more influential factor than CSR in shaping this generation's perception of employers. These results offer real-world inferences for organizations aiming to improve talent acquisition by embedding inclusive practices and visible CSR programs. The study adds to present literature by quantifying the comparative value of DEI and CSR in employer branding strategies tailored to Gen Z expectations.

Keywords: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Corporate Social Responsibility, Employer Brand Image, Gen Z, Socially Responsible Business Practices.

INTRODUCTION

Background

In the past few years, the dimensions of the workplace have undergone a dramatic transformation, mainly because of evolving employee expectations, increasing diversity of the workforce, and a growing emphasis on ethical corporate conduct. One of the most prominent reasons behind demographic shifts that have influenced organizational strategy is the entrance of Generation Z. This generation consists of those individuals who were born between 1997 and 2012 and are now becoming part of the global labor force. This generation is known for its digital fluency, social consciousness and emphasis on purpose driven work. Candidates belonging to Generation Z tend to evaluate their potential employers beyond the basic financial metrics, focusing instead on values such as inclusivity, environmental stewardship and brand authenticity (Francis et al., 2024).

This generational shift has obliged many organizations to revisit and revamp their employer branding strategies. Employer Brand Image (EBI) can be defined as the perception of job seekers for a firm's work environment, culture, its values and leadership (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005). For Generation Z, these perceptions are often shaped by two critical dimensions, namely the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) climate of the organization and its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives.

The perceived DEI refers to the extent to which an individual perceives an organization to be fair, inclusive and supportive of diversity in both though as well as representation. On the other hand, perceived CSR refers to the extent to which an organization is seen as a contributing member of society through ethical practices, environmental initiatives and community engagement (Akben-Selcuk, 2019). Prior research suggests that DEI and CSR activities are good not only for the internal structures of the organization but also significantly impact how individuals perceive the employer brand, specially socially aware and cause-driven Generation Z job seekers (Hofer, Spieß, Ploder, & Bernsteiner, 2024).

Despite growing interest in this domain, limited empirical research exists reconnoitering the interconnectedness between DEI, CSR and Employer Brand Image in the eyes of Gen Z. This research seeks to bridge this gap by investigating the role of DEI and CSR perceptions in impacting the Employer Brand Image resulting in Gen Z's intention to apply for a job.

Research Problem

Even if organizations offer competitive salaries and benefits, they still might struggle to attract and retain top Gen Z talent. Traditional branding efforts often fall short because Gen Z evaluates their employers not only in terms of the monetary benefits they offer, but also in terms of purpose, societal impact and equity. Despite promoting DEI and CSR efforts extensively via corporate communications, their impact on building the employer brand image in the sight of Generation Z talent remains underexplored. There is a need to empirically assess how perceptions of DEI and CSR contribute to shaping a positive employer image and whether this perception translates into application intention among Gen Z. It is essential to understand this relationship so that organizations can come up with policies that strengthen their employer brand and align their branding with the values of the emerging workforce.

Research Gap

Even though DEI and CSR have been extensively studied across HR, legal, and sustainability fields, majority of research has explored them distinctly and not as integrated factors affecting employer branding. Classic employer branding models (e.g., Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Berthon et al., 2005) seldom include DEI or CSR as core predictors. Though CSR has caught some attention in branding studies, DEI is a relatively a new concept, gaining momentum especially after movements like Black Lives Matter and #MeToo. There remains limited empirical work that jointly examines DEI and CSR as drivers of employer brand image, predominantly using validated quantitative models and established measurement scales such as (Mor Barak, 2020) for DEI and (Turker, 2009b) for CSR.

Nevertheless, most existing literature is based on Western contexts with studies being held largely in the US, UK, and Europe hence leaving a gap in understanding how these concepts do in emerging markets. In countries like Pakistan, where cultural and generational dynamics differ, there minimal research on how Gen Z talent perceives employer branding through the lens of DEI and CSR. This study attempts to fill that gap by delivering a contextual, data-driven perspective from the South Asian region.

Significance of Research

This study aims to contribute to both academic literature and corporate practices. Scholars can benefit from this research by enhancing their understanding of nuanced mechanisms through which the principles of DEI and CSR influence the employer attractiveness in Gen Z talent of business schools. For practitioners it provides actionable insights into branding and human resource strategies aligned with generational values. The findings are specifically relevant to Pakistan's emerging job markets, where there is an urgent need to align talent acquisition and retention methods with the global standards.

Research Questions

In line with the objectives of this study, the following research questions are formulated to explore the influence of perceived Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) on Employer Brand Image:

- How does perceived DEI influence Employer Brand Image?
- What is the relationship between perceived DEI and Employer Brand Image?
- How do perceived CSR efforts impact Employer Brand Image?
- What is the relationship between perceived CSR efforts and Employer Brand Image?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the past few years, organizations have started to rethink their employer branding strategies particularly as they try to resonate with the values, beliefs and aspirations of Gen Z. Generation Z includes all those individuals who were born roughly between the years 1997 and 2012. As this cohort has followed Millennials and is now ready to enter the work force, their expectations around diversity, ethics, inclusion and the broader societal impact have developed to be so important that the employers cannot simply ignore it. This generation is very different from the earlier ones. Most of them are earning their college degrees and will soon enter the next phase of their lives where they will be dominating the workforce (Pichler, Kohli, & Granitz, 2021). A fact that particularly strikes is that the concept of Diversity, Equity and inclusion (DEI) together with Corporate Social Responsibility, is not just a HR discourse anymore but constitutes to be a fundamental part of an attractive employer brand image. The two mentioned concepts are no longer marginal but form the image of an organization in the eyes of Gen Z talent. The study of literature from 2019 to 2025 aimed at synthesizing the present scholarly findings and highlight areas that require theoretical clarity or empirical robustness. Through this critical analysis of the literature, a more grounded and actionable understanding of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and Corporate Social Responsibility can be obtained so that these concepts can be strategically leveraged for the purposes of Gen Z recruitment and retention.

Theoretical Framework

This research is based on three interrelated theoretical perspectives namely Social Identity Theory, Signaling Theory and Attraction-Selection-Attrition (ASA) Framework. Each of these theoretical perspectives provides a conceptual lens to understand how DEI and CSR initiatives influence Employer Brand Image in the sight of Generation Z business graduates.

a). Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) suggests that people derive part of their self-concept from perceived membership in social groups and search for associations that strengthen their values and social identity. Generation Z, categorized by strong likings for fairness, representation, and societal impact, is extra likely to support organizations whose values mirror their own. DEI initiatives serve as indicators that an organization holds inclusive and equitable practices, which appeal to the social identity of Gen Z individuals. Likewise, CSR initiatives strengthen an organization's position with wider societal concerns, additionally improving its appeal. By evaluating these signals, Generation Z graduates form cognitive connections with the employer's brand, inducing their perception of its attractiveness and alignment with their personal identity.

b). Signaling Theory

Signaling Theory (Spence, 1973), enlightens how employers convey hidden organizational features to potential job seekers through observable actions or characteristics, and these are commonly referred to as signals. DEI and CSR efforts function as strategic signals of an organization’s internal culture, ethical standards, and commitment to social good. As job seekers are particularly value-driven Generation Z candidates they often operate under conditions of information asymmetry. Hence, these signals become grave in determining their understanding of an employer’s brand. A well-communicated commitment to DEI and CSR can consequently boost an organization's perceived employer brand image and deliver a competitive advantage in the labor market.

c). Attraction-Selection-Attrition Framework

The Attraction-Selection-Attrition (ASA) Framework given by Schneider (1987) advocates that persons are fascinated by organizations that imitate their own values, beliefs, and personality traits. In the context of this study, DEI and CSR initiatives are seen as critical organizational attributes that affect the initial stage of attraction. Generation Z candidates, known for prioritizing inclusivity, sustainability, and ethical conduct, are more likely to pursue employment opportunities in organizations where such initiatives are clearly integrated into the corporate ethos. Therefore, employer branding efforts that prioritize DEI and CSR are likely to resonate more strongly with this demographic, increasing the probability of attracting talent that aligns with the organization’s strategic human resource objectives.

Conceptualizing DEI, CSR and Employer Brand Image

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) condenses an organization’s commitment to nurturing representational diversity of people from diverse backgrounds, promoting fairness and unbiased behavior in terms of opportunity and access to facilities. The concept of DEI ensures that organizations encourage a culture of respect for people from all backgrounds and communities so that they feel valued and empowered to contribute. According to Gill, McNally, & Berman (2018) the successful transformation of an organization can be ensured if strategies focus Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) rather than “diversity” alone, together with creating environments that promote team inclusivity for a shared and valued employee experience. Equity particularly highlights the arrangements to address the issues of structural imbalances while diversity ensures that diverse viewpoints are not only present but evocatively integrated in the decision-making process.

Similarly, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) denotes an organization's charitable activities in economic, social, and environmental spheres that outspread the regulatory obligations, frequently explaining a bigger commitment to sustainable, eco-friendly and ethical practices. DEI and CSR when clubbed together, play a very important role in shaping the Employer Brand Image. Empirical research (e.g., Mor Barak, 2020; Turker, 2019) establishes that the combination of DEI and CSR initiatives donates meaningfully to an organization's appeal, predominantly among those demographic groups who are socially aware such as Generation Z.

DEI and Employer Brand Image

In present-day human resource and brand management discourse, the combination of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in employer branding has obtained increasing attention. As corporations strive for top talent across varied socio-cultural landscapes, DEI-determined employer branding is evolving as a strategic imperative instead of a peripheral initiative. The literature reviewed discovers this budding relationship around various organizational, geographic and cultural contexts, stressing both opportunities and challenges.

Wells et al. (2021) discovers the paradox met by Predominantly White Organizations (PWOs) in the U.S., where branding themselves as DEI-friendly while lacking internal diversity climate can lead to skepticism among prospective employees. This research recognizes that DEI messaging, particularly in the U.S. climate of sensitive racial strains and political opposition, is carefully observed by both underrepresented employees and conventional members of dominant groups. The study skeletons the risks of overcommitting DEI values short of institutional alignment and suggests a framework for more trustworthy employer branding in likewise multifaceted environments (Wells, Malik & Edmondson, 2021).

An analogous theme of legitimacy and cultural relevance is reverberated in Jarner's (2024) study on Finland's labor market. With the focus on foreign graduates exiting the country owing to a perceived lack of inclusion, this research study supports DEI-informed employer branding to attract and retain global talent. The results stress that positioning branding with organizational values and experiences of employees predominantly around work-life balance and inclusive culture is vital to attract a multicultural workforce. The study also underlines the significance of the matter that aligns with the targeted audience and calls for genuineness over performative branding strategies.

Francis et al. (2025) introduced the notion of a "DEI trifecta" aligned to local catchment areas. This conceptual paper claims that the efforts of employer branding can be most effective if they are aligned with the socio-cultural values of the societies from which they hunt for talent. This confined approach allows organizations to help employees experience a sense of belonging, advance engagement, and endorse inclusion. The research suggests catchment-specific branding as a new way to foster DEI when it comes to regional scenarios, thus improving recruitment and retention of diverse talents together.

Myra (2022) adds empirical insight from a qualitative case study of a Finnish organization recognized as a "Great Place to Work." The research concluded that there is a direct correlation between balanced organizational practices and employer brand image. This study also highlighted the fact that D&I are not fully operationalized in the corporate settings but rather they are glorified more only for sustainability purposes

On the wider branding front, Ferraro et al. (2023) explore DEI from a consumer-facing brand management perspective. They emphasize that DEI now plays a critical role in shaping brand identity and aligning with consumer expectations. However, the paper cautions that superficial or poorly executed DEI efforts can backfire, leading to consumer distrust. The authors provide a strategic framework for integrating DEI into brand management, urging organizations to balance

authentic representation with meaningful implementation across all touchpoints of brand communication.

Collectively, the literature suggests that DEI is not just a moral or compliance-based obligation but a strategic asset in employer and consumer branding. However, effectiveness hinges on authenticity, context-specific application, and the alignment of internal culture with external messaging. While the implementation of DEI practices in employer branding is gaining momentum globally, it remains an evolving field with substantial room for improvement, particularly in bridging the gap between intention and practice.

CSR and Organizational Attractiveness for Generation Z

Corporate social responsibility is explained as an organization's social responsibility encircling "the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary expectations that a society has of organizations at a given point in time" (Carroll 1979: 500). Corporate Social Responsibility has always played a crucial role in the relationship between an organization and its stakeholders for the purpose of sustainable management, the upgradation of their life's worth and involve activities that are purely voluntary in nature (Peters, 2024).

A cross-industry study conducted by Francis, Rangasamy, Balasundaram, Iyer, and N. (2024) discovered that the relationship between CSR activities and Organizational attractiveness, is mediated by Perceived Organizational Support (POS) explaining that the Generation Z workers value the act as well as the supportive message of CSR.

Research conducted on the IT students of Gen Z cohort in Austria, revealed that though monetary incentives are the main influential factor for organizational attractiveness, however, CSR engagement as compared to working hours still remains high (Hofer, Spiess, Ploder, & Bernsteiner, 2024). In a study by McElwee and Khan (2024), a comparison of Gen Z and Gen X preferences was studied, it was discovered that Gen Z place higher value to CSR, transparency together with ethical practices as compared to previous Generation X. This indicated that CSR initiatives by the organizations impact both job choice and engaged employment.

Hypotheses

According to the research problem, review of the existing literature and theories, the subsequent correlational and causal hypotheses are formulated:

H1: Higher perceptions of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) significantly influence the Employer Brand Image among Generation Z in Pakistan.

H2: Higher perceptions of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) significantly influence the Employer Brand Image among Generation Z in Pakistan.

H3: A significant positive correlation exists between perceived DEI and Employer Brand Image.

H4: A significant positive correlation exists between perceived CSR and Employer Brand Image.

Conceptual Framework

Fig. 1 Conceptual Framework

Independent Variables: *Perceived DEI and Perceived CSR*
Dependent Variable: *Employer Brand Image*

According to the definition given by April (2021), diversity involves recognizing visible and invisible differences among people; equity ensures fair treatment and equal opportunities by removing barriers; and inclusion creates environments where individuals feel valued, respected, and fully able to participate (April, 2021).

Hopkins (2007) says Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is about acting ethically and responsibly toward all stakeholders, both inside and outside the organization. This means treating them in ways that align with the norms of a civilized society. CSR covers not just social, but also economic and environmental responsibilities, aiming to improve quality of life while still maintaining the company's profitability.

Employer image can be defined as the combined short-term perceptions or impressions individuals hold about particular attributes of a company as a place to work (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study focuses on quantitative research design on order to understand the impact of independent variables namely Diversity Equity and Inclusion and Corporate Social Responsibility on Gen Z job seekers, with brand image being the mediating variable. This is a cross-sectional study as the data has been collected and analyzed at one point in time. This research mainly uses a correlational design, primarily focusing on studying the associations between DEI, CSR, Employer brand image and ultimately Gen Z talent intention to apply for a particular job at a particular company. The study is a mix of descriptive statistics, correlation and regression models and ANOVA to broadly assess the connection between the said variables using SPSS 25.0.

Sample and Data Collection

The target population for this study were students of Undergraduate and Graduate degree programs in Pakistani Universities. A total of 111 students responded to the questionnaire, while only 105 responses were usable. The other responses were disqualified due to some reasons.
The data for this study is primary in nature and was collected through structured questionnaires. The questionnaire was divided into 5 sections, starting from demographics, Perceived DEI Efforts, Perceived CSR Efforts, Employer brand image and Gen Z talents' intention to apply. The questionnaire was adapted with minor changes from Mor Barak's Diversity Climate Scale, (1998), Turker's CSR Scale (2009) and Berthon et al.'s Employer Attractiveness Scale (2005).
Both close-ended and open-ended questions were included in the questionnaire. As the questionnaire aimed to take insights into the level of preference Gen Z talent associated with an Organization's DEI and CSR efforts, hence a Likert scale was used for close-ended questions. 1 denoted an effort which was not at all important for a Gen Z applicant, while 5 denoted an effort that they considered to be essential. Questionnaires were distributed through Google forms to maximize reach. A combination of convenience and snowball sampling was used under non-probability sampling technique.

Data Reliability

Cronbach's Alpha was used to check the reliability of data. The score of 0.972 indicates excellent internal consistency among the items on the questionnaire.

Table 1. Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
.971	28

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The collected data was analyzed using SPSS software to conduct various statistical tests. The results gathered were calculated numerically and the analysis on these results are prepared statistically. Descriptive statistics aimed to summarize the demographic characteristics of the sample. Correlation analysis determined the relationship between key variables and regression model was used to assess the predictive power of variables on dependent variables. ANOVA test helped compare the mean differences between different groups of participants.

Descriptive Statistics

The data was collected from 105 Business Schools graduates. Descriptive statistics helped understand the general trends of the data collected. The results of the demographics of the sample are summarized in the Table 2 below:

Table 2. *Demographics of Sample and Data*

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Explanation
Gender	1.55	0.5	Values range from 1 = Male to 2 = Female. A mean of 1.55 suggests a slightly higher number of females.

Age	1	0	All participants fall into the same age category (coded as 1), so there is no variation.
Currently Studying In	1.21	0.409	Most respondents are undergraduates (coded as 1), with some at graduate level (coded as 2).
Semester	5.61	2.277	On average, students are in their 5th or 6th semester, with a widespread across semesters 1 to 8.
Field of Specialization	5.04	3.394	There is considerable diversity in specialization fields (coded from 1 to 9).
Province (University Location)	1.03	0.218	Most universities are located in one province (like Sindh, coded as 1), with very few from others.
Prior Internship/Work Experience	1.5	0.502	Responses are almost evenly split between those with and without prior work experience.

DEI Items had mean scores ranging from 3.65 to 3.90 and the standard deviation (approximately 1.0-1.3) indicated a moderate spread in responses. The mean of CSR items ranged from 3.59 to 4.01, again showing a strong central tendency and relatively low dispersion. Nevertheless, the Employer Brand Image items ranged from 3.74 to 4.03, hence indication an overall favorable perception of the employer brand image.
Skewness and kurtosis for all the items of the study were within the acceptable ranges of (±2) which indicates the assumption of normality for further parametric testing can be made.

Reliability Analysis

The results of Cronbach's Alpha are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. *Cronbach Alpha*

Construct	A	No. of Items
DEI	0.935	10
CSR	0.922	10
EBI	0.926	8

As the results of Cronbach's alpha for all the constructs are above the minimum threshold of 0.7, hence this indicates high internal reliability of the scales used for each construct.

Correlation Analysis (Pearson's)

Pearson's Correlation was used to evaluate whether a linear relationship exists between DEI, CSR and EBI. Results are shown in Table 3 given below.

Table 4.*Correlation*

		IVDI_Avg	IVSR_Avg	DVEB_Avg
IVDI_Avg	Pearson Correlation	1	.864**	.858**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	105	105	105
IVSR_Avg	Pearson Correlation	.864**	1	.811**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	105	105	105

DVEB_Avg	Pearson Correlation	.858**	.811**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	105	105	105

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Pearson's Correlation between DEI and Employer Brand Image and CSR Employer Brand Image is 0.858 and 0.811 respectively, at the significance level of 0.01. This indicates a strong positive correlation of the independent variables with the dependent variables. All relationships have proved to be statistically significant at the 0.01 level, suggesting that both DEI and CSR are positively associated with employer brand image.

Multi Linear Regression

Table 5. Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.869[a]	.755	.750	3.23465	2.106

a. Predictors: (Constant), IVSR_Avg, IVDI_Avg
b. Dependent Variable: DVEB_Avg

The model summary shows R=0.869, and R2=0.755 which means that 75.5% of the variance in Employer Brand Image is explained by the independent variables. Adjusted R2 value of 0.750 confirms that the model is strong after accounting for the number of predictors. The Durbin-Watson value = 2.106 suggests no autocorrelation in the residuals, satisfying another key regression assumption.

ANOVA

Table 6. ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3293.017	2	1646.508	157.365	.000[b]
	Residual	1067.223	102	10.463		
	Total	4360.240	104			

a. Dependent Variable: DVEB_Avg
b. Predictors: (Constant), IVSR_Avg, IVDI_Avg

Sig value is less than 0.05, indicating that the model is statistically significant.

Coefficients

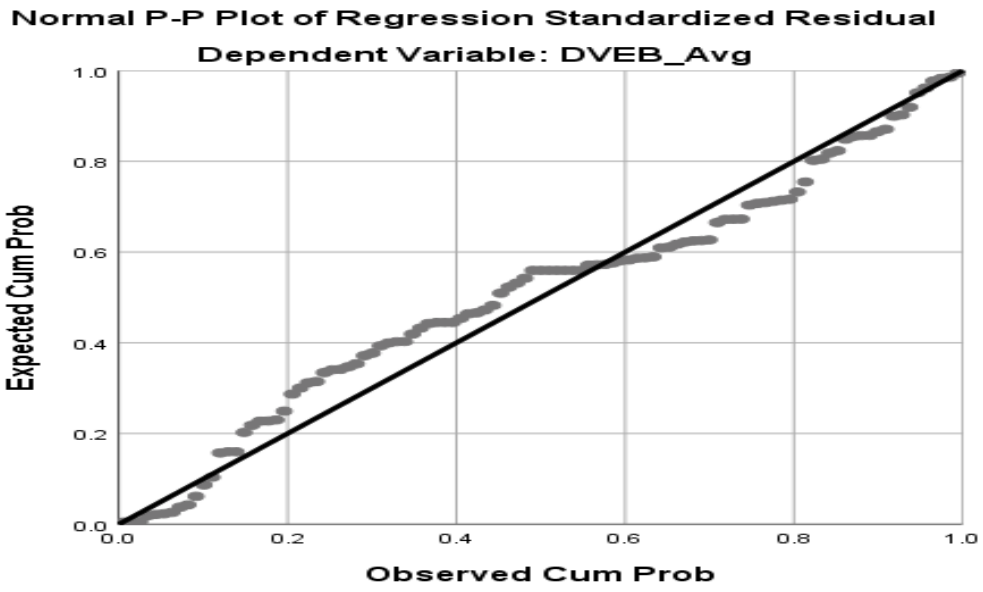
Table 7. *Coefficients**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	4.189	1.458		2.872	.005		
	IVDI_Avg	.508	.080	.622	6.387	.000	.253	3.947
	IVSR_Avg	.228	.081	.274	2.812	.006	.253	3.947

a. Dependent Variable: DVEB_Avg

The beta coefficients for DEI and CSR are .622 and .274 respectively with Sig. value less than the threshold of 0.05. Therefore, both DEI and CSR significantly predict Employer Brand Image. DEI is the stronger predictor as indicated by its higher value of beta coefficient.
VIF = 3.947 and Tolerance = 0.253 for both DEI and CSR, signifying satisfactory multicollinearity. This settles that DEI and CSR, although correlated, do not show problematic multicollinearity in the model.

Fig 2. Normal P-P Plot of Regression



The P-P Plot, shows points that mostly follow the diagonal line, with very little deviations, suggesting that the residuals are approximately normally distributed, hence supporting the validity of the regression analysis

Summary of Analysis

The statistical findings reveal that both the independent variables, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), are strong and statistically significant predictors of the dependent variable, Employer Brand Image. DEI can be considered as a more dominant

predictor, suggesting that inclusive organizational culture has a greater impact on how Gen Z talent perceives the employer brand.

The results support the conceptual and theoretical model and validate the hypothesis that socially responsible and inclusive organizational environments are essential to building an attractive employer brand, predominantly for socially conscious cohorts such as Gen Z.

The study investigated the impact of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) on Employer Brand Image (EBI) among the final year business students studying in the Pakistani Universities. The main objective of the study was to empirically assess how perceptions of DEI and CSR efforts contribute to shaping an organization's attractiveness as an employer for Generation Z talent, who are emerging as the new workforce, following millennials.

FINDINGS

Descriptive statistics indicated a high level of agreement among respondents on DEI (mean ≈ 3.8), CSR (mean ≈ 3.8), and Employer Brand Image (mean ≈ 3.9) constructs. Cronbach's alpha values exceeded the 0.7 threshold for all constructs with DEI being 0.935, CSR 0.922 and Employer Brand with 0.926, indicating excellent internal consistency and scale reliability (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

The Pearson correlation coefficients demonstrated strong, statistically significant positive relationships between DEI and Employer Brand ($r = .858$, $p < .01$), CSR and Employer Brand ($r = .811$, $p < .01$) and DEI and CSR ($r = .864$, $p < .01$). These results approve that both DEI and CSR are highly interrelated and jointly impact employer perception.

The Multiple Linear Regression (MLR) analysis supplemented these relationships. The model explained 75.5% of the variance in Employer Brand Image ($R^2 = .755$, Adjusted $R^2 = .750$), which is a substantial explanatory power for social science research (Cohen, 1988). Both independent variables were significant predictors. DEI ($\beta = .622$, $p < .001$) was the strongest predictor of Employer Brand. CSR ($\beta = .274$, $p = .006$) also contributed significantly, though to a lesser degree. No multicollinearity was identified, as VIF values were below 5 and Tolerance levels above 0.2. Furthermore, the Durbin-Watson statistic of 2.106 explained that residuals were not autocorrelated hence satisfying another key assumption of regression.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Theoretical Implications

The results of this study empirically authenticate prior conceptual models that studies DEI and CSR as the main pillars of a strong employer brand. As proposed by Akben-Selçuk (2019), CSR improves stakeholder trust and enhances an organization's image, while DEI plays a central role in attracting socially aware talent (Francis et al., 2024). Similarly, Hofer et al. (2024) stressed that Generation Z, precisely, is more likely to apply to firms that exhibit ethical, inclusive, and socially responsible behaviors.

The leading influence of DEI found in this study affirms Mor Barak's (2020) Diversity Climate framework, which recommends that organizational inclusion practices not only improve employee well-being but also improve organizational attractiveness.

These findings hence add to the Employer Branding theory by explaining that employer brand is no longer just about compensation and benefits alone. Rather it is deeply tied to how inclusive and socially responsible an organization is perceived, especially among the relatively new workforce of Generation Z.

Practical Implications

For HR professionals and employer brand strategists, these findings suggest that DEI should be the top priority of recruiters by putting it forward in their communications, showcasing diverse hiring practices, inclusive leadership together with equitable growth opportunities.
CSR initiatives taken by the company must be visible and authentic, especially when it comes to environmental sustainability, community outreach, and ethical governance. Organizations must integrate DEI and CSR values into onboarding, training, and performance appraisal systems to reinforce internal consistency and build brand credibility.

Limitations and Future Research

Although the results are statistically strong, the study is limited by a non-random sampling strategy based on convenience and snowball techniques, which might hamper generalizability. This study is based on the survey results of 105 business graduates. Hence generalizability of all business graduates in Pakistan can be affected. Geographic representation was skewed, with most responses coming from one province.
Future research should follow a longitudinal design to assess whether these perceptions translate into actual job application decisions and employee retention. Moreover, qualitative studies could explore how and why Gen Z perceives DEI or CSR as valuable in specific cultural contexts.

Concluding Remarks

Collectively, the study offers compelling and sound empirical evidence that DEI and CSR suggestively improve Employer Brand Image, particularly among emerging talent pools. As workforce demographics evolve and ethical awareness rises, employer branding must increasingly align with inclusive and socially responsible organizational practices. For those organizations who aim to attract and retain Gen Z talent in Pakistan and beyond, embedding DEI and CSR into the employer value proposition is not just advisable but rather essential.

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