

**The corporate social responsibility (CSR) employer brand process: Integrative review
and comprehensive model**

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Abstract

Firms are increasingly drawing on corporate social responsibility (CSR) in their employer branding to increase attractiveness and engage current and potential employees, and to ensure consistency in employee brand behaviours. However, there is a dearth of literature synthesising CSR and employer branding research to understand employee engagement with CSR-firms from a branding perspective. In this article, the authors carried out an integrative literature review of CSR and employer branding literatures. Informed by signaling theory, the authors develop a conceptual model of the CSR employer branding process as a cohesive view from the potential and current employee perspective. Our review highlights the need for firms to achieve CSR consistency in terms of (a) embeddedness of CSR values, and (b) levels of internal CSR. These two factors frame a typology that enable managers to better execute their CSR employer brand identity to achieve favourable results, such as a high-quality talent pool and positive affective, cognitive and behavioural employee outcomes.

Keywords: *Corporate social responsibility employer brand, CSR, employer brand, internal CSR, CSR branding*

Introduction

A growing body of literature, media, and public commentary emphasise the value of CSR as a competitive advantage (Aggerholm, Andersen, & Thomsen, 2011; Du et al., 2010; Siegel & Vitaliano, 2007). Research suggests a firm's socially responsible image positively influences stakeholder engagement (Greening & Turban, 2000), and this has led to some firms engaging with CSR in superficial ways. For instance, firms use CSR signaling to communicate CSR initiatives as an additional attribute or feature to existing products and services, when in fact they do not include the publicised CSR traits (Siegel & Vitaliano, 2007). Such behaviour presents the risk of stakeholders perceiving firm's CSR behaviours as being insincere. This means that in the firms attempt to be viewed as attractive, in fact they are doing harm to the firm's brand (Anselmsson & Melin, 2016; Scheidler, Edinger-Schons, Spanjol, & Wieseke, 2018).

In contrast, CSR branding is a holistic approach that involves the *CSR-firm* (see Table 2) wholly committing to, and consistently implementing, CSR as part of their organisational strategy (Lin et al., 2010). CSR branding can be considered a safeguard against *CSR insincerity*, whereby the firm's CSR communications is considered untruthful and motivated by profit maximisation. Siegel and Vitaliano (2007) argue CSR may not be the silver-bullet

that many expect, and that a non-CSR-firm using CSR will result in reduced profits. The idea that CSR and CSR insincerity may be detrimental is contrary to the normative belief that CSR is positively linked to profitability (Kang, Germann, & Grewal, 2016).

Since there are differing opinions about the potential benefits of CSR, firms need to think carefully about their choice to engage in such a strategy, and to what extent. From a financial perspective, CSR imposes costs on a firm that could be spent on other strategies to enhance the firm's competitive position. For example, The Walt Disney Company adds significant cost to its operations having contributed \$348 million in charitable donations and provided 3.4 million hours of service through its VoluntEARS program (The Walt Disney Company, 2018). The Walt Disney Company's extensive allocation of resources to CSR initiatives may represent a common concern for contemporary business management, since explicating the benefits of such expenditure is difficult (Scheidler et al., 2018). Another complexity for firms that engage with CSR-based brand management activities is that implementation remains relatively unexplored and challenging (Lii & Lee, 2012).

A crucial part, and often overlooked, part of the CSR branding process, is employees (Brammer, Millington, & Rayton, 2007). Employees are an important internal stakeholder group that both contribute to, and represent, the corporate brand (Lindgreen, Maon, & Vallaster, 2016). In addition, the insider status of employees gives them increased awareness of the extent of a firm's sincerity in CSR strategies (Scheidler et al., 2018). Further, CSR branding requires employers and employees to become corporate partners, whereby firms enable employees to fulfil brand promises and successfully implement CSR strategies (Aggerholm et al., 2011). Thus, firms need to recognise that honouring their social responsibility to employees is essential in building a strong CSR brand (Lindgreen, et al., 2016). Such a genuine 'inside-out' approach (e.g., Mosely, 2007; Lindgreen, Xu, Maon, & Wilcock, 2012) to CSR brand management requires firms to embed the brand's ethical stance within the practices and policies in which both potential and current employees engage. A corporate CSR partnership requires the co-creation of employer-employee values that enhance employee CSR commitment through dialogue.

To address the gap in understanding the importance and role of employees in terms of the CSR branding process, we consider two key concepts in this paper, including employer brand and employee engagement (by both potential and current employees). First, the *employer brand* is defined as 'the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided

by employment and identified with the employing company' (Mosley, 2007, p. 130). Strong employer brands provide a distinctive identity that potential and current employees can identify with, and aspire to join (Morokane, Chiba, & Kleyn, 2016). The employer brand frames an employee value proposition that further integrates and unifies the firm's brand, marketing, and human resource efforts and, ultimately, affords the firm additional sources of competitive advantage (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). Hence, employer branding appears to offer a valuable overarching framework for envisaging more comprehensive and theoretically informed understandings of how both potential and current employees engage with the firm's CSR brand.

Second, employee engagement includes both potential and current employees, because a potential employee's intention to apply is based on the applicant's perception of the employer's attractiveness (Greening & Turban, 2000). Furthermore, it is these early perceptions that form the basis of attraction between strong virtuous brands, and the connection by potential employees to a brand's meaning and purpose. There is broader support for the notion that potential and current employees seek out a sense of personal authenticity at work (e.g., Bloemer & Dekker, 2007), underscoring the opportunity for socially responsible employer brands to enable positive outcomes for both employees and the firm. More specifically, Gill-Simmen et al. (2018) propose that an employee's psychological connection to the brand is distinctive from their attachment or commitment to the organisation (e.g., organisation identification). Thus, employee benefits (e.g., a sense of personal authenticity) may stem more particularly from CSR brand-self connections.

With this background established, the authors present an integrated review of relevant extant literature spanning CSR and employer branding to address current gaps in understanding by presenting a CSR employer branding process model. First, we provide an overview of our approach to literature review and theoretical lens. Second, we introduce our proposed model to illustrate the CSR employer branding process model, followed by a detailed description of key concepts identified in the literature. Third, we discuss how these concepts portrayed in the model relate to one another and identify practical and theoretical implications. Last, we identify areas for further research.

Integrative literature review approach and theoretical lens

We used an integrative literature review approach (c.f., Torraco (2005)) to review and synthesise the literature to inform the conceptual development of the model. This paper

focuses on the potential and current employee stakeholder groups, and their interaction with an employer's CSR brand. Accordingly, we analysed and critiqued three streams of literature, as indicated in Figure 1, these included: Stream 1: Employer Brand – potential employee focus, Stream 2: Employer brand – current employee focus, and stream 3: CSR branding. Figure 2 highlights the key theoretical components examined within each stream, and included in the conceptualisation of our model.

STREAM 1: Employer Brand – Potential Employee Focus	STREAM 2: Employer Brand – Current Employee Focus	STREAM 3: CSR Branding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Synthesis of key theoretical developments within this stream • Employers understand the intangible asset made up of the relationships between the corporation and its potential and current employees. • The employer brand notion synthesises external and internal facing relationships into a single term which can be actively managed. • Informed by corporate branding as an overarching framework for engaging customers, employer branding offers a framework for engaging potential employees. • Externally, active employer brand management builds associations for employer attraction, enhancing person-organisation value matching. • The categories identified to improve organisation attractiveness are: (1) employment (e.g., employee rewards, type of work), (2) organisational successes (e.g., past success, current standing), (3) external image (e.g., industry and stakeholder groups), and (4) product or service characteristics. <p style="text-align: center;">Informing articles</p> <p>(Ambler & Barrow, 1996) (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004) (Davies et al., 2018) (Greening & Turban, 2000) (Highhouse et al, 2009) (Maxwell & Knox, 2009) (Miller & del Carmen Triana, 2009) (Morokane et al, 2016) (Schlager et al., 2011) (Schlegelmilch & Pollach, 2005)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Synthesis of key theoretical developments within this stream •Shift to internal branding value-based approach. •Human resource 'products' viewed as employee touch-points and 'customer corridor' used to describe the recruitment process, orientation, employee communication, shared services, reward, measurement performance, management and staff development. •Internal employer brand management contributes to organisation identity and culture, resulting in loyalty and employee productivity. •Investigation of current employees finds that CSR dimensions such as social value ('people first attitude') are extremely important and impacts employee's job satisfaction and identification. •Leading employer brands are hard to imitate and often have top media attention. •'Best places to work' are associated with lower turnover rates. <p style="text-align: center;">Informing articles</p> <p>(Aggerholm et al., 2011) (Ambler & Barrow, 1996) (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004) (Barrow & Mosley, 2005) (Gond et al., 2015) (Greening & Turban, 2000) (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016) (Lin et al., 2010) (Moroko & Uncles, 2008) (Mosley, 2007) (Schlager et al., 2011) (Theurer et al., 2016)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Synthesis of key theoretical developments within this stream •The CSR brand is distinctive as it is stakeholder-based and strategically integrated orientation toward ecological and social well-being. •CSR brands centre on a socially responsible dimension intended to differentiate a firm's products or services from those of competitors. In this manner, ethical corporate branding assumes a greater role in reputation management, thus providing a clear vision about how the firm's brand makes the world a better place. •A successful socially responsible employer brand is the foundation for relationship building and cross-disciplinary processes, which create, negotiate and enact sustainable employer-employee relationships <p style="text-align: center;">Informing articles</p> <p>(Aggerholm et al., 2011) (Cha et al., 2016) (Fan, 2005) (Gond et al. 2015) (Highhouse et al., 2009) (Jones et al., 2014) (Lin et al., 2010) (Lindgreen, et al., 2012) (Tavassoli et al., 2014)</p>

Figure 1: Integrative review approach: Three main overarching streams of literature

Signaling theory

The premise of *signaling theory* is that information affects decision-making processes by individuals, businesses, and governments. A signal is the deliberate communication of positive information to convey positive firm attributes. The signal observability is the extent to which people external to the firm can notice the signal. Signaling theory is increasingly used in strategic management and entrepreneurship to understand how information is communicated between two parties (Connelly et al., 2011). A central component of signaling theory is signal cost, whereby some firms are better able than others to absorb the associated costs of communicating positive information. In contrast, some firms do not have the capacity or inclination to invest in such costs and, as a result, may be tempted to engage in false signaling. Signaling theory is fundamentally concerned with reducing information asymmetry

between parties. Information asymmetry can work both ways. For instance, job applicants use qualifications to signal their potential performance to employers. Likewise, firms can signal heterogeneous boards to communicate high social values (Miller & del Carmen Triana, 2009), thus becoming more attractive to potential employees (Ryan, Sacco, McFarland, & Kriska, 2000), and attract a quality workforce (Greening & Turban, 2000).

Signaling theory is useful to conceptualise the CSR employer branding process model since scholars recognise that firms use CSR information to positively influence multiple stakeholder groups. CSR research has used signal theory to explore firm attractiveness, recruitment, and self-selection of employees (Highhouse et al., 2009; Jones et al., 2014). In addition, many CSR initiatives entail elements of *unobservable quality* (e.g., cause marketing, discretionary donations, or, stated process improvements to reduce waste), which unfortunately leave rise to opportunistic firms to engage in false signaling (Kirmani & Rao, 2000). The effect of strong outward facing signals, if inconsistent with the firm's *internal CSR* actions (see Table 2), can lead to brand harm (Hawn & Ioannou, 2016). Asymmetric information about a firm's CSR plays a key role in the stakeholder's assessment of the firm's social performance. For instance, Scheidler, et al. (2018) found that consumers boycotted shopping at Walmart when inconsistencies in CSR initiatives became apparent.

According to Dögl and Holtbrügge (2014), firms can influence employee perceptions by applying signaling theory to their internal policies and practices, as employees rely on apparent characteristics associated with their employer's corporate policies. In a like manner, Ryan et al. (2000) found that applicants (i.e., potential employees) were more likely to apply for employment, and not withdraw from the process, with firms that undertook signaling with the purpose to increase their attractiveness as an employer. These insights suggest that, in a CSR employer brand context, it is favourable for a firm to provide potential applicants with detailed information regarding a firm's values and expected employee brand behaviours during recruitment to avoid information asymmetry at the outset. With this overview of signaling theory presented, and the applicability to CSR and employer branding processes established, we now present our proposed Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Employer Branding Process Model, informed by our review of the extant literature.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Employer Branding Process Model

Table 1 provides a summary of the integrative review findings. We identified two discrete journeys, including the: (a) potential employee CSR journey, and (b) current employee CSR journey.

Table: 1 Key Integrative review findings: Proposed model components

Key Concept	Key Findings of Integrative Review	Informing Articles
Potential employee CSR Journey – CSR employee value proposition		
Potential employee perception	<p>Employer branding represents one method through which firms can secure and retain sought-after employees.</p> <p>The employer brand image provides benefit for both potential recruits and their recruiters (e.g., agency) during the recruitment process.</p> <p>Job seekers receive signals from a firm's corporate social performance that affect firm attractiveness.</p> <p>The result of affiliating with a firm with a high level of CSR for job seekers is anticipate pride, and a match of personal values and firm values.</p>	(Aguinis & Glavas, 2012) (Gond et al. 2015) (Greening & Turban, 2000) (Knox & Freeman, 2006) (Highhouse et al., 2009) (Jones, Willness, & Madey, 2014) (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016)
Applicant intention to apply	<p>The employer brand contributes to the degree of a company's attractiveness to current and potential employees.</p> <p>The employer brand also assists potential applicants in assessing the extent to which their personal ethical stance aligns.</p> <p>Hence, a strong employer brand generates favourable attitudes and motivates potential employees to apply. For potential employees the CSR dimension with the strongest effect is social value (people first attitude), then reputational value, followed by diversity value (variety of work).</p>	(Highhouse et al., 2009) (Moroko & Uncles, 2008) (Ryan et al., 2000) (Schlegelmilch & Pollach, 2005)
Perceived sincerity of CSR signaling	<p>Uncontrolled communication sources will report on a firms CSR conduct. Exemplary CSR conduct may be reported as CSR rankings, whereas CSR misconduct may be reported on the news or online. The nature of uncontrolled communication can have a strong effect on the attitudes of potential employees, thus questioning the motivation or sincerity of firm CSR conduct. Employer brand perceptions are not limited to the targeting audience, as other stakeholders (e.g. consumers) will have view of whether the company is indeed a good place to work. Evidence of greenwashing evokes impressions of hypocrisy and insincerity.</p>	(Anselmsson & Melin, 2016) (Bloemer & Dekker, 2007) (Fassin & Buelens, 2011) (Gond et al. 2015) (Kirmani & Rao, 2000) (Scheidler et al., 2018)
Current Employee CSR Journey – CSR employee experience		
CSR employee experience	<p>Employees experience the employer brand through a web of interactions, known as touch-points. Touch-points are an accumulation of human resource activities that encompass daily interactions, critical incidents, feedback, social interaction and compensation.</p> <p>Socially responsible firm behaviour towards employees is mainly expressed through employee-oriented CSR activities.</p> <p>Internal CSR aimed can provide self-enhancement for employees and act as a substitute for pay.</p>	(Ambler & Barrow, 1996) (Barrena-Martinez et al, 2017) (Bhattacharya et al., 2007) (Davies et al., 2018) (Matten & Crane, 2005) (Morokane et al., 2016) (O'Fallon & Butterfield, 2005) (Tavassoli et al., 2014)
The gap - Employee expectations (dis)confirmation	<p>Thee confirmation/disconfirmation paradigm is used to understand the gap between employee expectations (based on the brand identity) and actual employee experience.</p> <p>Inconsistent CSR strategies with larger external than internal efforts increase (a) employees' turnover intentions, via perceived corporate hypocrisy and emotional exhaustion, and (b) actual employee turnover.</p>	(Bloemer & Dekker, 2007) (Davies et al., 2018) (Du et al., 2010) (Gond et al. 2015) (Morokane et al., 2016) (Morrison & Robinson, 1997) (Scheidler et al., 2018)
Employee outcomes	<p>Branding techniques aimed at employees, centres on using brand values to align employee behaviour.</p>	(Brammer et al. 2007) (Gond et al. 2015) (Hansen et al,

Much research focuses on moderating variables for outcomes (e.g. employee engagement and brand knowledge are predictors in likelihood to endorse brand, but employee engagement moderates relationship).

2011) (Lii & Lee, 2012) (Morokane et al., 2016) (O'Fallon & Butterfield, 2005)

Segments within the employer brand audience are not homogeneous (e.g. older employees and male employees react more positively to how warm and/or competence of employer brand).

Based on the integrative review findings, the authors developed a proposed CSR Employer Branding Process Model, illustrated in Figure 2. In line with the integrative review findings, the Model depicts both the: (a) potential employee CSR journey, and (b) current employee CSR journey.

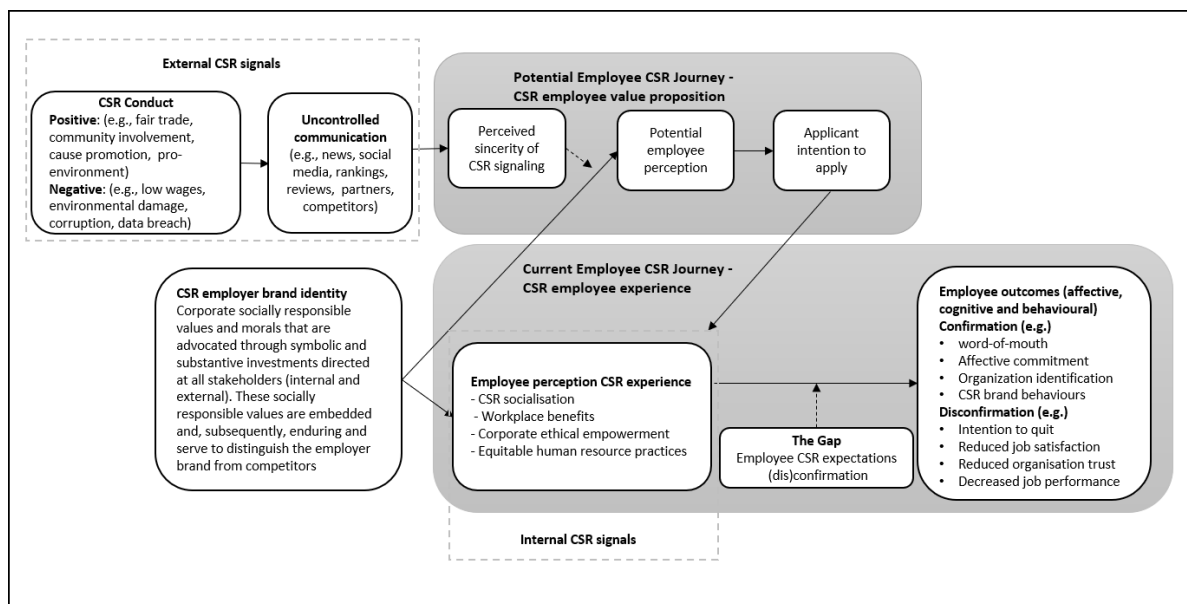


Figure 2: Corporate social responsibility employer branding process model

To enable conceptual clarity, we have itemised and defined each of the proposed model components used within the model in Table 2.

Table 2: Defining key terms

Term	Definition
Applicant intention to apply	The extent to which a potential employee is motivated to pursue employment at a firm.
Corporate social responsibility	The firm's responsibilities to development and implement policies and practices that address the three pillars of ecological, economic and social sustainability, that maximise positive outcomes for all stakeholder groups beyond requirements of law.
CSR conduct	Actual corporate socially responsibility initiatives or behaviours that are internal or external focused. CSR conduct is usually positive (e.g., fair trade, community involvement programs, pro-environment), or negative: (e.g., low wages, environmental damage, corruption, data breach).
CSR-firm	A values-based firm that has core competencies in strategic corporate social responsibility, and their business-decisions are motivated to address the three pillars of ecological, economic and social sustainability.
CSR employer brand	CSR employer brand is based on the idea that potential and current employees will be attracted to a values-based socially responsible firm, and that firm will deliver on its CSR promise both external and internal, providing employees with values-based management and initiatives aimed at their individual requirements for development and wellbeing.
CSR employer brand identity	Corporate socially responsible values and morals that are advocated through symbolic and substantive investments directed at all stakeholders. These socially responsible values are embedded and, subsequently, enduring and serve to distinguish the employer brand from competitors.
CSR employee experience	Employee perceptions of internal CSR initiatives and activities that are directed by the firm towards the employee. That is, based on socially responsible values and morals that are embedded and demonstrated via substantive investment (e.g., CSR socialisation, workplace benefits) and symbolic investment (e.g., corporate ethical empowerment and equitable human resource practices).
CSR employee value proposition	A value proposition directed to potential employees that is based on socially responsible values and morals embedded and demonstrated via substantive investment (e.g., CSR resource commitment, community engagement) and symbolic investment (e.g., CSR advertising and CSR public relations).
Employee outcomes	An employee's affective, cognitive, and/or, behavioural result because of their work experiences.
External CSR signals	Consequence of a firms internal and external CSR activity.
Internal CSR	Socially responsible behaviour by a firm towards employees. This behaviour is mainly expressed through employee-oriented CSR activities such as fostering employment stability, a positive working environment, skills development, diversity, work-life balance, empowerment and tangible employee involvement (Mory et al., 2015, p. 2)
Perceived sincerity of CSR signaling	The extent to which a firm's CSR communications is considered truthful and motivated by an authentic ethical stance.
Potential employee perception	A potential applicant's view of the job characteristics and firm attributes of potential employer.
The Gap - employee CSR expectation (dis)confirmation	The comparison between an employee's CSR expectations of their employer and their actual CSR experience. When expectations are confirmed, CSR expectations and CSR experience are in alignment. Disconfirmation is the result of a discrepancy between CSR expectations and CSR experience. Positive disconfirmation is when CSR expectations are exceeded, and negative confirmation occurs when CSR expectations exceed CSR experience leading to negative employee outcomes.
Uncontrolled communication	Communications about the firm that is unpaid, and the content is not regulated by the firm (e.g., news, rankings, reviews, competitors).

We now detail the key concepts included in our proposed CSR Employer Branding Process Model, and drawing on extant literature, describe these concepts as they pertain to the Model. The following description of concepts is structured in line with the Model, firstly looking at the potential employee CSR journey, and secondly detailing the current employee CSR journey.

Potential Employee CSR Journey - CSR Employee Value Proposition

As depicted in the Model, the *CSR employee value proposition* (see Table 2) is the journey taken by the potential employee. The *CSR employer brand identity* (see Table 2) is used by a firm to improve their attractiveness during the recruitment process and allows the firm to differentiate from competitors (Knox & Freeman, 2006), thus providing a competitive advantage. However, as shown in the Model the CSR employee value proposition may be affected by *external CSR signals* (see Table 2) that may impact potential employees (i.e., potential employee perception and the resulting applicant intention to apply). Accordingly, the Model identifies three main constructs within the potential employee CSR journey, (a) potential employee perception, (b) applicant intention to apply, and (c) perceived sincerity of CSR signaling. The following section more fully explains these three construct relationships.

Potential employee perception

The *potential employee perception* is defined as the applicant's view of the job characteristics and firm attributes of potential employer. The employer branding process represents actions that firms can take to influence potential applicant's perceptions that the firm attributes and job characteristics are enticing (Knox & Freeman, 2006). Lievens and Slaughter (2016) suggest that the employer image is a useful tool for individuals to form transient mental representation to assess the firm's attractiveness as an employer. A key aim of the CSR employer brand identity is to positively influence potential employee perceptions of the firm, and this can be achieved by providing details about the firm's corporate socially responsible values and morals. CSR initiatives have a positive effect on the firm's employer attractiveness (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Highhouse et al., 2009), and Jones et al. (2014) suggest job seekers anticipate a feeling of pride from being associated with a firm with superior corporate social performance. Since potential employees have limited information about the actual job, they use the firm's reputational value to decide on whether the firm is a good place to work (Schlager et al., 2011).

Applicant intention to apply

Jones et al. (2014) argue an applicant's evaluation of a firm's attributes and job characteristics affect an *applicant's intention to apply* for a job vacancy (see Table 2). The CSR employer brand identity represents the firm's CSR values and morals advocated through the firm's behaviour and communications. This source of information enables potential applicants to understand the perceived 'fit' of values between themselves and the firm, thus prompting an application (Cha et al., 2016). When considering the importance of CSR initiatives to potential applicants, Schlager et al. (2016) found social value, including: a respectful environment, friendly relationships among co-workers, and a people-first attitude, as the most important attribute to attracting potential employees. Reputational aspects, including well-known products, were secondary considerations. In addition, Davies et al. (2018) found that the demographics of potential employees, such as age and gender, influence perceptions of CSR attractiveness, with older men reacting more positively to the warmth and competence of the employer brand.

Since the employer brand identity is particularly important for potential employees, signaling social responsibility (e.g., advertising and public relations conveying information about CSR activity) to create a unique value proposition will attract talent with values that align with the firm values. Thus, 'winning the war for talent' even in times of high unemployment, may be enhanced with CSR signaling (Bhattacharya & Korschun, 2008).

Perceived sincerity of external CSR signals

As indicated in the Model, the potential employee's *perceived sincerity of CSR signaling* (see Table 2) is affected by the firm's *CSR conduct* (see Table 2) and resulting *uncontrolled communications* (see Table 2). Subsequently, the perception of sincerity influences the *potential employee's perception* (see Table 2) of the firm, leading to intention to apply. *External CSR signals* (see Table 2) are the consequence of a firm's internal and external CSR activity. In contrast, a non-CSR firm may focus their CSR initiatives to achieve a desired corporate reputation, social status, and/or perceived external prestige (Hameed et al., 2016). Traditionally, a firm's investment in external stakeholders was to create a positive reputation, thus enhancing the stakeholder perceptions (Highhouse et al., 2009). Drawing on our understanding of signaling theory, as outlined earlier, our Model proposes that signaling of positive CSR by CSR-firms will deliver an advantage over those competitors whose CSR initiatives may appear as insincere (Du et al., 2010). Insincere signaling occurs when a firm's

initiatives are noticeably linked to extrinsic motivators, such as profit maximisation (Du et al., 2010).

The role of uncontrolled communication in perceived sincerity of external CSR signaling

It is important to remember the firm cannot regulate all communications, and in our Model, we conceptualised these communications as uncontrolled communications. Some examples of uncontrolled communications can include word-of-mouth, personal interaction, perceptions of resource commitment, non-sanctioned blogs, and websites. Grace and O'Cass (2005) found that stakeholders often consider uncontrolled communications more credible as they are not driven or controlled by marketers. Consequently, uncontrolled communications often have an important and direct effect on stakeholder attitudes and behaviours. This means that if a firm uses insincere, untruthful, or dishonest tactics, then it is likely that uncontrolled forms of communication will proactively publicise these discrepancies (Scheidler, et al., 2018).

As an example, Nyilasy, Gangadharbatla, and Paladino's (2014) case of BP indicated the firm's claims of Beyond Petroleum and excellent environmental credentials in their advertising and marketing presented inconsistencies when considered alongside BP's oil spill, which was arguably the worst in recent history. Due to the inconsistency and hypocrisy involved, uncontrolled media coverage of the event was extensive. In another case, Schlegelmich and Pollach (2010) found the consumer response to a firm's corporate hypocrisy resulted in buyer-boycotting. Thus, inconsistent CSR strategy reported in uncontrolled communications will have a negative moderating effect on potential employee perception.

In summary, our proposed Model depicted in Figure 2 illustrates a CSR employer brand identity will positively influence potential employee perceptions of the firm and, thus, the applicant's intention to apply. This influence requires that potential employees perceive external CSR signals to be sincere, including uncontrolled media such as news, social media, reviews, and CSR rankings will report the firm's CSR conduct. If the uncontrolled media reporting contradicts the CSR employer brand identity, then potential employees will view the firm's messages as insincere. Further, our Model suggests that if the potential employee is successful with their application, then they will commence on the *current employee CSR journey*, which we will now address.

Current Employee CSR Journey – Employee CSR Experience

The current employee CSR journey describes how the employee connects and interacts with the firm. As discussed in the previous section, the *employee CSR experience* (see Table 2) begins before they join the firm. As shown in the Model, the process starts prior to becoming an applicant, and ends once the employee leaves the firm. Properly executed, the CSR employer brand ensures that *internal CSR* signaling (see Table 2) aimed at the employee work experience are in-line with the CSR employer brand identity. The seamless implementation of the firm's CSR strategy should result in a consistent employer brand identity and employee experience. As shown in the Model, employee confirmation of CSR expectations will result in positive *employee outcomes* (see Table 2).

Understanding and optimising the employee experience is a key priority for firms (Moroko & Uncles, 2008). The employee experience encompasses all elements and encounters over the course of the employee journey through a web of interactions, known as touch points (Rosethorn, 2009). Drawing more specifically upon signaling theory, these touch points are internal signals that either confirm or disconfirm the validity of the CSR employer brand identity. Thus, as illustrated in the Model, the *employee CSR experience* (see Table 2) encompasses employees' interactions with, and perceptions of, internal CSR initiatives. Further, to understand better the 'fit' between the CSR employer brand identity and the 'reality' of the employee CSR experience, it is important to ascertain the internal CSR initiatives that frame the employee's experience. The Model includes four main internal CSR initiatives: (a) CSR socialisation, (b) workplace benefits, (c) corporate ethical empowerment, and (d) equitable human resource practices. The following section more fully explains these four construct relationships.

CSR socialisation

Organisation socialisation techniques intend to integrate employees to help them make sound decisions that will benefit the brand (Kim, Cable, & Kim, 2005). In our case, CSR socialisation refers to the extent to which an employee perceives that the firm's internal culture and environment assists them to learn and identify with its CSR values, beliefs and expectations. Employee engagement with this internal signaling may commence during recruitment as part of effective human resource practices. Such practices aim to ensure recruits possess the knowledge and ability to either: (a) opt out if their values are not consistent with the firm's core social responsibility beliefs, or (b) self-select to continue with the recruitment process. Once the employee joins the firm, other aspects of CSR socialisation

such as guidance and support become vital as employees master their jobs and relevant CSR responsibilities. When an employee joins a CSR-firm, the firm often expects the employee to behave from the outset in ways that are socially responsible. To ensure this occurs quickly and effectively, firms may provide guidance through tools such as newsletters, annual reports, meetings, videos, printed materials, orientations, training, events, CSR experts, and/or storytelling (Maon, Lindgreen, & Swaen, 2009).

Davies and Crane (2010) contend that ongoing CSR socialisation is imperative, and the authors propose that creating employee engagement with a strong triple bottom line philosophy is a trade-off. They argue hiring individuals with (a) experience and capabilities to deal with mainstream brand management, and (b) who already identify with the triple bottom line philosophy, are ‘two critical employee attributes that appear to be rarely found together’ (p. 126). Thus, CSR socialisation provides employees with firm-specific relevant social responsibility skills and knowledge, and assists employees’ understanding of the challenges of balancing a triple bottom line in highly competitive markets by aligning strategy and practices.

Workplace benefits

At the rudimentary level, a safe and functional environment is expected and necessary for employees to carry out their roles and responsibilities. However, the extent to which an employee perceives that the firm provides non-financial workplace benefits, over and above what is legally required, constitutes a form of substantive investment that signals the firm’s commitment to the employee. Clark et al. (2017) suggest that providing employees with workplace benefits such as recognition, flexibility, and work life balance leads to improved employee performance and positively affects perceived work experience. Microsoft and Google are well-known examples offering workplace benefits including nap rooms, gyms, lactation rooms, and child-care facilities. Thus, it is expected that workplace benefits contribute to the CSR employer brand of a firm.

Corporate ethical empowerment

Powell et al. (2013) promote corporate ethical empowerment (CEE) as essential to ensure ‘employees are given the ability to make meaningful contributions to the way CSR is strategised, managed, implemented and maintained’ (p. 2). CEE includes the active encouragement of employee participation in co-creating CSR, which is a shift away from traditional formal management where CSR is conceptualised and implemented from the top-

down. A firm's responsible behaviour is largely the result of employees' everyday decisions and actions, consequently, employees are a central contributor to a CSR focused philosophy. CEE guides brand behaviours and enables co-creation of initiatives that are in-line with the firm's values and mission.

Rather than constituting an isolated initiative, CEE must co-exist with an ethical internal climate, upon which expected behaviours are based (Powell et al., 2013). Typically, employee's ethical decision-making is not formalised with training, thus, by encouraging active ethical empowerment, it is expected that more effective CSR approaches will enhance employee knowledge and substantially improve behavioural alignment (Bhattacharya, Sen, & Korschun, 2007; Matten & Crane, 2005). Moreover, involving employees in mechanisms such as CEE in planning assures they develop a sense of ownership and pride (Maon et al., 2009), hence, further developing the CSR employer brand.

Equitable human resource practices

Equitable human resource practices (EHRP) refers to the degree to which an employee perceives that their firm is committed to creating a fair and impartial work environment (Barrena-Martínez, López-Fernández, & Romero-Fernández, 2017). These practices create a climate in which employees can develop and thrive regardless of race or gender and signals to current employees that the firm is committed to social responsibility (Lii & Lee, 2012). The underlying principle of EHRP is prioritising value creation in the design of CSR human resource strategy. As such, EHRP requires commitment from firms to better understand the issues that are important to their employees.

In terms of identifying particular practices, Barrena-Martínez et al. (2017) contrast several international benchmark reports, proposing that the correct application of a socially responsible human resource policy includes: employment; management of labour relations; occupational health and safety; training and education; diversity and equal opportunities, and equal remuneration for women and men. Based on the findings of Lii and Lee (2012), evidence indicates that employees who perceive a fair and equitable work environment are more likely to reciprocate with positive affective and/or behavioural consequences, thus contributing to a strong CSR employer brand.

The Gap – employee CSR expectations (dis)confirmation

Our Model depicts employee CSR expectation (dis)confirmation (i.e., ‘the gap’; see Table 2) as a factor moderating the link between employee perception of CSR experience and employee outcomes. The confirmation/disconfirmation paradigm of customer satisfaction (Oliver, 1980), is relevant to a firm’s employees, which can be considered as internal customers, and can assist us in understanding moderating factors affecting employee outcomes within the process of *CSR employer branding* (see Table 2). We expect to find that when employee’s CSR expectations and perceived CSR experience align (i.e., confirmation), then positive employee outcomes are likely to result (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). In contrast, if expectations and experience do not align (i.e., disconfirmation), one of two scenarios may result depending on the direction of the disconfirmation. In the first scenario, positive disconfirmation occurs when the employee’s experience with the firm exceeds their initial expectations. In this case, strong positive employee outcomes such as positive word-of-mouth, affective commitment, organization identification, and CSR brand behaviours are likely to occur (Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1998). The second scenario, negative disconfirmation, occurs when the employee’s experience with the firm falls short of their initial expectations, resulting in negative employee outcomes (Morrison & Robinson, 1997), such as intention to quit, reduced job satisfaction, reduced organisation trust and decreased job performance.

Employee outcomes

There has been recent growth of scholarly activity focusing on the psychological effect of internal CSR on incumbent employees (also known as micro-CSR) (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Gond, El Akremi, Swaen, & Babu, 2017; Rupp & Mallory, 2015). Micro-CSR research has focused on antecedents and consequences of CSR activities to help explain employee and firm performance (Hansen et al., 2011). Gond et al. (2017) consolidated individual reactions to CSR into attitudinal and behavioural outcomes, which are reflected in our Model with positive employee outcomes realised due to employee perception of CSR can include positive word-of-mouth, affective commitment, organisation identification, and CSR brand behaviours. In terms of addressing negative outcomes, recent studies suggest that where employees perceive inconsistent CSR strategy, this can result in intentions to quit, reduced job satisfaction, reduced organisation trust, and decreased job performance (Gond et al., 2017).

In summary, our proposed CSR Employer Branding Process Model suggests employees embody a form of ‘insider status’ in that they may directly experience and become more intimately aware of consistencies, or inconsistencies, concerning CSR strategies. This means current employees are better positioned than external stakeholders to assess and compare both external and internal CSR signaling initiatives as part of their everyday working lives, and in turn, this may lead to greater awareness of information asymmetry. However, internal CSR signals (e.g., CSR socialisation, CEE, workplace benefits, and EHRP) offer the firm opportunities in which they can actively manage the employee’s CSR experience to avoid negative disconfirmation (i.e., ‘the gap’). This type of accountability can help ensure the firm ‘walks the talk’. Our Model also highlights that CSR initiatives facilitated by the CSR employer brand identity are likely to have a positive effect on the employee’s overall perception of their CSR experience and in turn facilitate positive employee outcomes.

Corporate social responsibility Employer Brand Characteristics: A Firm Typology

Our proposed CSR Employer Branding Process Model indicates that CSR employer brand success hinges on two main factors, including the firm’s: (a) CSR employee value proposition and its efficacy in attracting value-aligned employees; and (b) active management of the employee’s CSR experience to ensure that positive confirmation of the CSR employer brand occurs. These two key insights point to two fundamental CSR employer brand firm characteristics: (a) embeddedness of CSR values (i.e., the extent to which CSR is part of the firm’s strategy and daily practices), and (b) internal CSR (i.e., the extent of a firm’s socially responsible behaviour directed towards employees).

Using these two constructs, the authors have been able to construct a firm typology of CSR Employer Brand Characteristics, illustrated in Figure 3. The x-axis of the typology represents a high-low continuum of internal CSR from high Internal CSR through to Low internal CSR. The y-axis represents a high-low continuum of CSR values, from low peripheral levels through to high embedded levels. These axes enable us to identify and characterise four main types of CSR Employer Brand Characteristics, including (a) Underperformers; (b) Greenwashers; (c) Work-perks, and (d) CSR Employer Brands.

As shown in Figure 3, the *CSR Employer Brand* quadrant (i.e., top left quadrant) denotes a firm that (a) attracts potential and current employees with similar values, and (b) manages an employee CSR experience that aligns with the CSR employer brand identity (i.e., thus avoiding a negative disconfirmation ‘gap’). To express this insight another way, a firm in the

CSR Employer Brand quadrant embeds CSR values throughout all levels of the firm’s core competences and the employee value proposition, as well as a high level of internal CSR follow-through to ensure that the employee’s CSR experience is consistent with the firm’s identity.

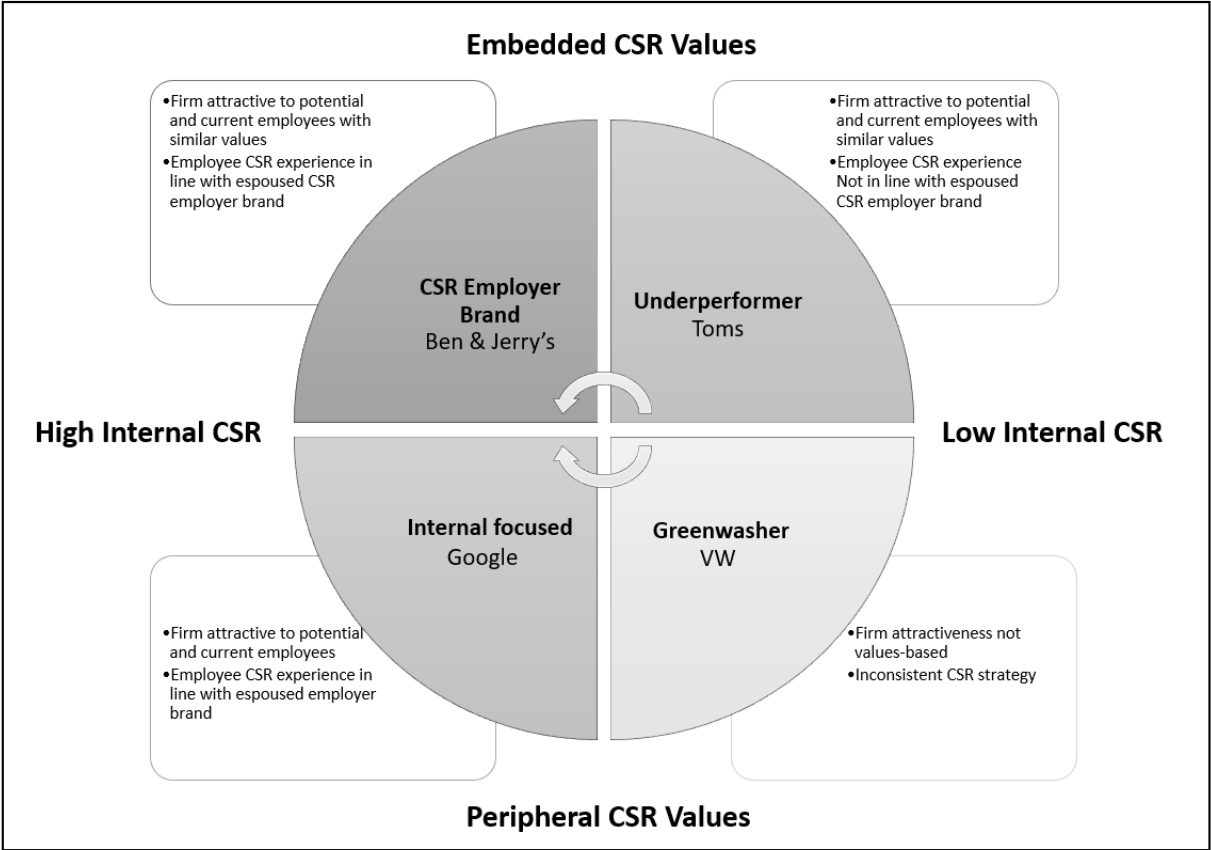


Figure 3: Corporate social responsible employer brand characteristics and typology

We have compiled four purposive case studies in Table 3 to help demonstrate the particular conceptual value of our typology. Table 3 summarises concepts from extant literature (Highhouse et al., 2009; Maxwell and Knox, 2009), rankings (e.g., SmartRecruiters, Reputation Institute), and provides a review of socially responsible brand performance indicators for four firms, including Ben & Jerry’s, Toms, Google, and VW. Table 3 details the mission, employee-directed CSR initiatives, construed external image, product/service characteristics, and overall performance according to employee online review site and enables comparison between the firms. Synthesis of the information relating to Ben & Jerry’s within Table 3 indicates that, of the four firms analysed in Table 3, this firm embodies greatest overall CSR Employer Brand.

Table 3: Comparing socially responsible brands according to extant literature, rankings and review systems

Mission	Employee-directed CSR	Construed external image	Product/service characteristics	Glassdoor employee review
Ben & Jerry's - Rank #1 SmartRecruiters¹				
To engage Ben & Jerry's employees in philanthropy and social change work; to give back to our Vermont communities; and to support grassroots activism and community organising for social and environmental justice around the country.	Philanthropy is led by Ben and Jerry's employees who serve on committees that review grants. Shown by diversity of workforce, including storytelling of workforce.	- Ben & Jerry's Foundation winner 2014 National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy's Corporate Grant maker - Founding members of the Business for Social Responsibility organisation - Carbon offset program donations of pre-tax profits	- Ingredient sourcing: Caring dairy, cage free eggs, fair trade. - Fair trade - Climate justice - Responsibly sourced packaging	4.4/5 89% Recommend to a friend 98% Approve CEO Pros: work conditions and free ice cream Cons: franchise model limits career progression
Toms - Rank #14 SmartRecruiters¹				
Improve living, with every product you purchase, Toms will help a person in need. One for One®	Programs for youth. Workspaces are open, collaborative. The Toms is a diverse team, driven by the idea that we can use business to improve lives.	One for one – operates in 70 countries including 60 million shoes, 400 000 glasses, 335 000 weeks of safe water and 25 000 safe birth services.	Product development begins with research to identify the greatest needs around the world. Once a need is decided on, interventions explored.	2.5/5 29% Recommend to a friend 61% Approve CEO Pros: Values are inspiring Cons: Management behaviour inconsistent with firm values
Google - Rank #3 Reputation Institute #10 SmartRecruiters¹				
To organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful.	Support families with onsite amenities, parental leave, and savings plans. Give employees access to healthcare. Match employee charitable donations. Assist with financial planning and professional development.	'Data-driven, human-focused philanthropy powered by Google'. This takes the form of programs such as using data to uncover racial injustice, translating books through an open-sourced platform to improve education.	Wide ranging products and services	4.4/5 89% Recommend to a friend 95% Approve CEO Pros: Work life balance, talented co-workers, benefits (gym, food) Cons: bureaucracy, management ability
VW - Rank #123 (2017) #12 (2014) Reputation Institute¹				
We are a globally leading provider of sustainable mobility.	Equal opportunities, modern and attractive environment, forward-looking organisation with exemplary leadership and corporate culture.	Commitment to sustainable, transparent and responsible management. Practice Group-wide sustainability coordination and forward-looking risk management.	Policies in line with governance	3.9/5 82% Recommend to a friend 86% Approve CEO Pros: Pay, rewards Cons: Work life balance, culture

¹ Further information available at (websites accessed October, 2018): benandjerrysfoundation.org, glassdoor.com, google.com/search/howsearchworks, reputationinstitute.com/csr-best-practices, smartRecruiters.com, toms.com, and volkswagenag.com/.

In contrast to the apparent success of Ben & Jerry's in terms of both embedded CSR values and high internal CSR, our typology identifies Toms as an Underperformer. We find that Toms has deeply embedded CSR values, but according to online reviews appears to have low internal CSR. This example reinforces the notion that while a strong CSR employer brand identity (such as Toms) attracts employees with like values, negative (dis)conformation can occur due to low internal CSR, thus leading to poor employee outcomes.

The two lower quadrants of the typology show a lack of embeddedness of CSR values, that is, the firm's CSR initiatives are peripheral and not focused on integration within the firm's strategy and operations. In particular, the *Work-Perks* quadrant represents high internal CSR and peripheral CSR values. Our assessment places Google within this quadrant, as it ranks third in the 2017 Global CSR RepTrak report (Reputation Institute, 2017), and boasts a range of socially responsible employment options, such as generous parental leave, excellent health care options, and onsite family support and amenities. Google's reported commitment to employees is extensive, and this commitment is backed-up by employee comments online focusing on benefits at work.

Volkswagen (VW) exemplifies the fourth and final quadrant in our typology, the *Greenwasher*, after recent events in which the company deliberately deceived the public over emission levels. In addition, employee online review sites indicated that VW employees perceive the negative work life balance and culture of this firm to outweigh provisions of good salary and other work benefits. Further, VW currently ranks #123 on the Global CSR RepTrak report (2017), when in 2014, the firm was ranked #12 (Reputation Institute, 2014). The CSR employer brand story of VW embodies similarities to the history of the energy firm Enron. That is, prior to its demise, Enron had been on the 100 Best Companies to Work for in America and received six environmental awards in 2000 (Fan, 2005). In broader terms, both the VW and Enron cases reinforce that CSR employer brand success is not a static end-point or goal, but rather a firm must continually and consistently follow-through on its CSR employer brand identity. These case study examples demonstrate that the Typology can offer useful insights and comparisons of CSR employer brand performance and enables comparison of CSR employer brand performance based on firm characteristics embedded CSR values and internal CSR.

Discussion and theoretical implications

The Model proposed in this paper extends the CSR literature by creating greater conceptual clarity and a more comprehensive understanding of how potential and current employees perceive, comprehend, and interpret CSR. In addition, our Model enables insights into how these perceptions relate to subsequent affective, cognitive, and behavioural CSR outcomes. In doing so, this paper contributes to the theory of CSR and employer branding by developing a comprehensive and theoretically informed understanding of how employees engage with CSR.

Particularly crucial to extending extant theory of CSR, the proposed model provides an integrative and evidence-based approach to delineating and linking CSR constructs, from both a potential and current employee perspective. Considering the CSR journey of both potential and current employees in our review enables the Model to illuminate how the firm's CSR actions, behaviours, and communications will have differing effects for both stakeholder groups. Furthermore, our Model further substantiates the need to achieve CSR consistency in terms of both embedding CSR values and high internal CSR follow-through. Importantly, the Model demonstrates that even a responsible business model, such as Toms' 'one for one' is insufficient for CSR employer brand success with the inconsistency leading to dissatisfied employees.

Managerial implications

Two main managerial implications stem from the integrative review and Model developed in this paper. The first of these implications centres on the vital role of consistent external and internal CSR signaling. Indeed, upon commencing employment, pre-conceived expectations of the internal work climate are quickly confirmed, or disconfirmed. One way to avoid fragmented brand communications (i.e., inconsistent or poorly aligned internal and external signaling) could be to merge the design, implementation, and monitoring of these communications under one umbrella of CSR employer brand identity. Such an approach could assist the corporate brand in sending a clear integrated message regarding the organisation's CSR stance to all stakeholders. From an employee or potential employee perspective, ensuing communications should clearly define realistic expectations in relation to their dual role as beneficiaries and executors of the CSR brand. Strategising a brand around core CSR values, articulating the firm's accountability to internal and external stakeholders, could also provide an effective way to integrate messages for both target audiences.

The second managerial implication relates to the importance of proactively managing the employees' internal CSR experience. The Model highlights that managers should pay particular attention to CSR socialisation, CEE, workplace benefits, and EHRP. These internal CSR signals can help to increase and align employee CSR values and knowledge, while encouraging employees to act in socially responsible ways. However, firms must be conscious of broader internal climates when implementing these signals. For instance, the firm must ensure that the broader internal climate supports modes and forms of employee interaction that allow employees to shape how the firm strategises, implements, and maintains CSR. Moreover, such practices must continually evolve in response to the changing needs and expectations of society. For example, issues surrounding the aging workforce that have been predicated for some time now (Truxillo, Cadiz, & Hammer, 2015) reinforce the imperative for human resource and employer branding practices to keep pace with changing workforce issues.

Future research directions

Through the integrative review and conceptual development of this paper, the authors identified five key areas for future research, including: (a) specification of potential employee CSR journey according to audience segments; (b) elaboration of how potential and current employees evaluate the sincerity of a wide range of CSR conduct; (c) empirical investigation into how current employees engage with internal CSR signals; (d) scrutiny of the nature and potential outcomes of employee CSR expectation (dis)confirmation; and (e) exploration of the cross-cultural implications of the CSR employer brand process. We detail each of these areas for future research below.

Specification of potential employee CSR journey and identify audience segments

In distinguishing key components of the potential and current employee CSR journey, our Model provides a conceptual base for future investigations to explore how aspects of these two journeys vary. For instance, Davies et al. (2018) found employer brand audiences are not homogeneous and require segmentation. In particular, Davies et al. (2018) highlighted that demographic differences (e.g., age and gender) influence preference for CSR initiatives. Further extension of this work could occur by examining the role of individual psychographic attributes (e.g., individual's ethical values and beliefs). Enhancing our understanding of how employees engage with CSR can add to the employer branding segmentation theories and strategies. Additionally, longitudinal research that follows the potential employee through the process model, from the potential employee CSR journey, then into the current employee

CSR journey, could assist in explaining possible interactions between a potential employee's personal ethical beliefs, and the individual's perceptions of the firm's CSR employer brand identity, and employee CSR experience.

Evaluate the sincerity of a wide range of CSR conduct

In highlighting perceived sincerity of CSR signaling as a key component of the CSR employer brand process, our Model also underscores the impetus for further research to elaborate how potential employees evaluate the sincerity of CSR conduct. The current trend of firms turning to political activism as a form of social responsibility initiative reinforces a need for research to consider the perceived sincerity of a wide range of CSR conduct and the impact of uncontrolled communication. Previously, firm behaviours were categorised simply as pro-CSR conduct (e.g., fair trade, community involvement), or CSR misconduct (e.g., low wages, environmental degradation). However, contemporary case study examples indicate a need for categorisation to reflect greater complexity. For instance, how would one classify Nike's campaign featuring Colin Kaepernick who started the Bend the Knee protests in NFL in September 2016 (c.f., Rathbone, 2017), which has led to consumer boycotting and social media images of burnt Nike apparel? Further, how do potential and current employees evaluate and perceive the sincerity of such conduct, and what do these perceptions mean for the employer CSR branding process (i.e., applicant's intention to apply, motivations, and commitment of current employees)?

Empirical investigation – employees perception of internal CSR, and resultant outcomes

There is a need for research which assists in understanding how current employees engage with activities such as CSR socialisation, workplace benefits, CEE, and EHRP as part of their everyday work lives. An exploratory approach, considering multiple CSR-firms as cases could be particularly useful in examining possible interactions. Moreover, further scrutinising the nature and potential outcomes of employee CSR expectation (dis)confirmation (i.e., 'the gap') represents another important opportunity for future research to build upon our Model.

Cross-cultural implications of the CSR employer brand process

Finally, as globalisation increases, the cross-cultural implications of the CSR employer brand process require greater exploration. For instance, O'Fallon and Butterfield (2005) suggested it is likely that attitudes to social responsibility differ across developed and less-developed nations. Such cultural differences could necessitate a need to reconcile the CSR employer brand when engaging with multicultural employee audiences, especially for larger multi-

national firms. Further research in this track could also consider whether a CSR employer brand may need to embrace a form of ‘glocal’ identity that takes into account the firm’s global nature, while continuing to act on local issues.

Conclusion

This paper contributes to the literature on CSR, employer branding, and signaling theory. Through an integrative review of extant research and theory spanning these domains, we developed a comprehensive CSR Employer Branding Process Model that considers how potential and current employees engage with CSR. Overall, the paper assists academics and practitioners in understanding key concepts related to CSR employer branding and substantiates arguments that CSR requires a sincere and embedded approach by firms, as opposed to being considered a simple add on product or service attribute. We suggest that CSR signaling is not a feasible approach for all firms to undertake. Deeper awareness of the constructs and relationships illuminated in the Model will assist in building strong and sustainable CSR employer brands that attract and retain the best suited employees with like-values.

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