

From Responsibility to Reputation: The Role of CSR in Shaping Brand Image and Performance in the Tourism Industry

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| <b>KEYWORDS</b><br><i>Corporate Social Responsibility, Sustainable Tourism, Brand Image and Business Performance</i> | <b>ABSTRACT</b><br>Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is one of the most important parts of business strategies in the tourism industry. The main goals of global tourism businesses are to protect the environment, give employees equitable working conditions, and improve the well-being of local communities. The purpose of this study is to find out how brand image affects the relationship between CSR and the performance of tourism businesses. This study looks at CSR from a legal, economic, ethical, philanthropic, and environmental point of view. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and Smart Partial Least Squares are used to analyze the data (Smart PLS). The results of this study show that the best corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices of tourism companies can be very good for the Nepalese economy and the implementation of different CSR policies, initiatives, and strategies can have a positive effect on the brand image. This research has value in that it identifies the role of CSR in the development of brand image and the improvement of tourism businesses in Nepal. It explains the mediating effect of the brand image and provides the useful insights that companies can employ CSR as a social responsibility and the tool of competitiveness and sustainability. |
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1. INTRODUCTION

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a company trend that has developed into a fundamental part of the new business model that no longer is merely a philanthropic venture but a strategic management instrument aimed at the balance of profit-making, social and environmental accountability (Jeet et al., 2020). The role of CSR in the tourism sector is especially important as businesses are reliant on the nature of the surrounding natural environment and cultural heritage as well as the relations with the community (Achmad and Yulianah, 2022). In the case of hotels, airlines, and tour operators, the survival of their business is directly associated with the conservation of the destinations and satisfaction of the host communities. This renders CSR not only a moral obligation, but a long-term sustainability and competitiveness requirement (Hye et al., 2023).

Nepal is a stimulating scene to examine CSR tourism. Mountains, biodiversity, and cultural richness are internationally known to attract both adventure and cultural tourists to the country (Pande, 2024). Tourism is an important part of the Nepalese economy and it provides employment, encourages infrastructure growth and local business. However, the benefits of rapid growth also have its own problems like environmental degradation, generation of waste and threat of cultural commodification. CSR is important in such an environment. Through responsible use of resources, management of wastes, cultural conservation and involvement of the communities, tourism enterprises would be safeguarding the same resources



that they are operating on. Meanwhile, these initiatives are able to reinforce ties with communities and improve perceptions of responsibility on the part of customers, leading to a favorable brand image (Mtapuri et al., 2022).

In the tourism industry, brand image plays a crucial role especially due to the fact that services are not tangible and decisions tend to be influenced by reputation (Ghorbanzadeh and Sharbatiyan, 2024). Customers are more and more inclined to choose the enterprises which can be discussed as really responsible to people and to the planet (Chatzopoulou and Kiewiet, 2021). Visitors will have higher chances to relate the brand with seriousness and genuineness when a hotel is situated as being environmentally friendly or a tour operator provides support to local artisans. This does not only create trust, but also creates loyalty, repeat visits and good word-of-mouth. Nonetheless, the advantages of CSR are based on genuine nature. The shallow attempts or overstated statements can cause doubt, which will hurt the brand reputation. This is why tourism businesses need to make the concept of CSR a part of their strategies in case they want to turn responsibility into reputation (Camilleri, 2022).

This paper thus seeks to address the question: How CSR practice can relate to the performance of tourism enterprises in Nepal? and also seeks to explore the mediating effect that brand image has. It has threefold aims, which are to examine the relationship between CSR and enterprise performance, to determine how CSR affects the brand image and how the brand image impacts performance, and to give practical solutions to guide tourism enterprises in developing strategies that balance responsibility and competitiveness. This study is useful in spreading knowledge on CSR within the context of developing economies, explaining why the brand image is a mediator, and providing practical suggestions to the stakeholders in this industry. Finally, the research indicates that CSR in tourism is not a mere obligation but also a way of establishing good reputations that would facilitate sustainable business performance.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A concept that has changed significantly in the past 30 years looks like Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). This aspect of business has no longer been regarded as a voluntary act of philanthropy, but rather as a key component of the business strategy. The tourism industry has special significance in CSR due to the dependence of the sector on environmental resources, the local communities, and cultural heritage (Goffi et al., 2022). The tourism businesses, be it the hotels and airlines, travel agencies and resorts are highly competitive and reputation based. To them, CSR is no longer a mere ethical imperative but a strong source of brand image and general business success (Suparjo and Dana, 2024). The subsequent review is a synthesis of the current debates over the contribution of CSR towards tourism, its implication on brand image, and the subsequent impact on enterprise performance.

### The Foundation of CSR in Tourism

The concept of CSR in tourism sector is largely perceived as the role of companies in ensuring that environmental conservation, ethical conduct, community building and social welfare are incorporated in the mainstream operations of the business enterprise (Achmad and Yulianah, 2022). Initial approaches to the concept focused on economic and legal responsibilities of companies, although with time, the concept has extended to encompass the ethical and philanthropic aspects. In the tourism industry, this translates into activities that include conservation of the marine ecosystems, minimizing the use of energy and water resources in the hotels, promoting cultural festivals, staffing with the locals and ensuring fair working conditions (Olszewski-Strzyzowski, 2022; Pansuwong et al., 2023). These practices are not only compliance activities, but they also make businesses accountable members of the society.

### CSR as a Driver of Brand Image

The tourism industry has a brand image that is influenced by tangible quality of service delivery as well as intangible attitudes of responsibility (Mabkhot and Piaralal, 2023). Customers in an industry where services are not material and experience are the key factor will find brand reputation indispensable on their decision-making. CSR activities contribute significantly to the development of this perception. A resort which sells itself as environmentally-friendly, invests in the green energy and promotes local artisans puts an image of responsibility and the authenticity at once. Equally, a company that shows its interest in carbon emission and offers a clear communication on its sustainability initiatives gains credibility among eco-friendly customers.

Customers are more and more looking at CSR as a brand value (Kim et al., 2021). Ethical aspects motivate modern tourists, especially young generations, and tend to follow their consumption with their own convictions. To them, the reputation of a brand is not only about comfort or luxury but also whether the company cares about its planet as well as the society. This change implies that any business in the tourism industry cannot do away with CSR in order to stay afloat. The brand image that is developed based on the authentic CSR establishes emotional bonds with the customers, distinguishes the businesses in the saturated market and is an ensurer of the long-term loyalty (Srivastava, 2024). Meanwhile, the genuineness of the CSR initiatives does count. Although authentic CSR builds a stronger brand image, those that are superficial and false, what is usually classified as greenwashing, can backfire. Therefore, the impact of CSR on the brand image is not just based on whether the initiatives are present but also credible and fit within the business strategy.



## CSR and Enterprise Performance

The connection between CSR and enterprise performance of tourism can be observed in terms of financial and non-financial results (Chaher and Lakhal, 2025). On the financial level, CSR may create value in terms of the higher rates of customer loyalty, recurrent bookings, and even premium pricing. When the traveler believes that the brand is responsible, it may be willing to pay more since they feel that something positive is happening by them buying the product. Moreover, CSR may lower the expenses of operation. Non-financial performance is not less important as well. CSR programs boost the morale of employees, generate talent and strengthen relations with stakeholders (Yusuf and Putra, 2024; Jiang et al., 2024). In the tourism industry where customer service is core to success, employees who are proud of the company values become more engaged and motivated thus result in services of higher quality. Additionally, businesses that are well integrated into their respective communities by using CSR will be in a better position to overcome crises, including natural disasters or pandemics due to the trust and goodwill that they have built. CSR therefore offers cushioning against risk and resilient base (Sharma and Sangal, 2025).

Moreover, CSR is an innovation in tourism businesses (Goffiet al., 2022). Responsible companies tend to test out some new modes of business, like eco-lodges, carbon-neutral flights, or community-based tourism. These innovations tap new market domains and revenue diversification, and this augments business performance. Sustainability of tourism related businesses in the long term hence not only depends on the economic benefits but also on how a business is able to incorporate the concept of CSR in the core of their business (Madanaguli, 2022).

Although CSR has a direct performance effect, to a large extent, its effect is mediated by brand image. Businesses that incorporate CSR in their branding strategies have better chances of registering positive results in terms of performance (Le et al., 2024). CSR builds trust, credibility and differentiation when the brand reputation is boosted. These elements in turn lead to customer loyalty, word-of-mouth promotion, and stronger market positioning. Brand image serves as a major intermediary between responsibility and performance results in an industry where word-of-mouth and online reviews are a strong force of determination in a choice.

Thus, from the above discussion the following hypothesis are developed:

H1: "CSR has positive and significant relationship with performance of tourism industry."

H2: "CSR has positive and significant relationship with brand image."

H3: "Brand image has positive and significant relationship with performance of tourism industry."

H4: "Brand image has mediating effect on CSR and performance of tourism industry."

## Methodology

The CSR variables incorporated into this study are legal, economic, ethical, philanthropic, and environmental (Carroll, 1991; Lee, Kim, & Roh, 2019). Likewise, the variables for brand image are brand awareness, brand association and brand affection (Latif et al., 2016). Similarly, the characteristics affecting a company's performance include client retention, efficiency, and product and service quality (Wamba et al., 2018; Gonzalez-Rodriguez et al., 2021). A 5-point Likert scale ranged from 1 for "strongly disagree" to 5 for "strongly agree." Three experts assessed the item objective congruence (IOC) of the questionnaire. Nepalese tourism businesses in the Gandaki Province were sampled using sampling techniques with a specific intent to collect data. A total of 119 tourism businesses responded to the study. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and Smart Partial Least Squares (Smart PLS) are utilized for data analysis.

## Data Analysis and Findings

The most recent version of Smart PLS 4, is used in the study as a SEM model. Structural equation modeling is a statistical technique for determining the connection between latent and observable variables (Hair, et al., 2021). The SEM is comprised of two steps: bootstrapping and the PLS analysis algorithm. Together, measurement and structural models comprise structural equation modeling. Table 1 includes the respondent's demographic information.

**Table 1. Demographic Profile**

| Gender            | Number of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Male              | 54                    | 45.38          |
| Female            | 65                    | 54.62          |
|                   | 119                   |                |
| Year of Operation |                       |                |
| up to 5 years     | 37                    | 31.09          |



|                            |     |       |
|----------------------------|-----|-------|
| 6 to 10 years              | 44  | 36.97 |
| 11 to 15 years             | 30  | 25.21 |
| above 15 years             | 8   | 6.72  |
|                            | 119 |       |
| <b>Number of employees</b> |     |       |
| 1 to 9                     | 47  | 39.50 |
| 10 to 20                   | 37  | 31.09 |
| 21 to 49                   | 29  | 24.37 |
| 50 to 100                  | 5   | 4.20  |
| 101 and above              | 1   | 0.84  |
|                            | 119 |       |
| <b>Type of Enterprise</b>  |     |       |
| Small                      | 93  | 78.15 |
| Medium                     | 26  | 21.85 |
|                            | 119 |       |

### Measurement model

The measuring model describes how observable variables are used to measure latent variables (Kang & Ahn, 2021). The Smart PLS was used in this study to evaluate the measurement model, which displays composite reliability and Cronbach alpha. It is acceptable for composite reliability values to range between 0.70 and 0.90. (Hair, et al., 2021). Cronbach alpha levels in excess of 0.70 are deemed acceptable (Griethuijsen, et al., 2015). It is acceptable for the average variance extracted (AVE) to be more than 0.5. (Hair, et al., 2021).

**Table 2. Reliability test**

|             | Cronbach's alpha | Composite reliability | Average variance extracted (AVE) |
|-------------|------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| CSR         | 0.743            | 0.748                 | 0.599                            |
| Performance | 0.777            | 0.778                 | 0.54                             |
| Brand image | 0.76             | 0.76                  | 0.515                            |

### Structural Model

The structural model is composed of the linkages and interactions between latent variables (Kang & Ahn, 2021). In this work, the structural model demonstrates the route coefficient and coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ).

### Path coefficient

The latent variables' degree of relationship with one another is shown by the path coefficient. Typically, the path coefficient ranges from about -1 to +1. All hypotheses are accepted and supported given that the p-value is less than 0.05 at a significance level of 5% and the t-values are greater than 1.96. (Hair, et al., 2021).

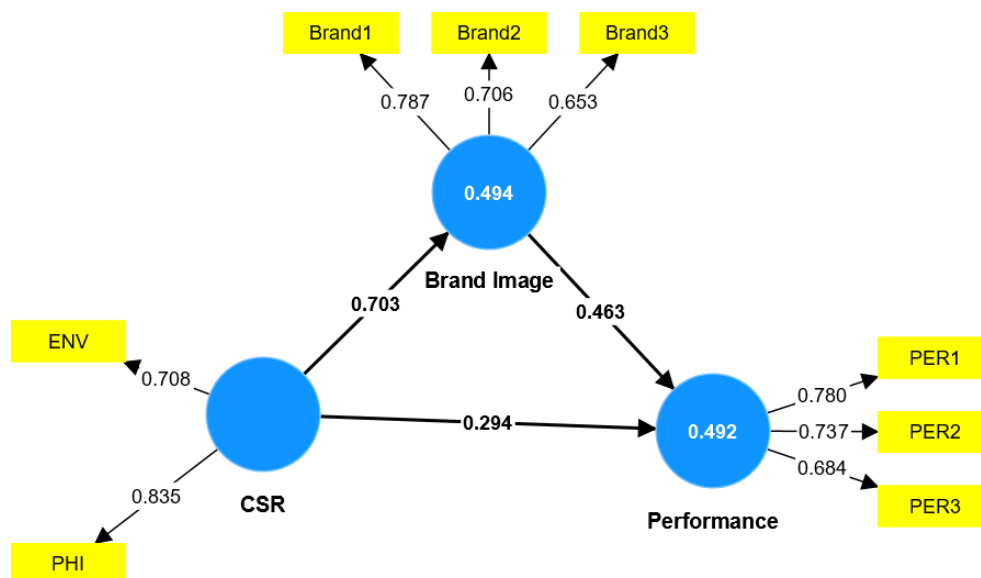


**Table 3. Hypothesis Testing**

|                                   | Standard Beta | Standard deviation | T statistics | P values | Verdict  |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|--------------------|--------------|----------|----------|
| CSR -> Performance                | 0.294         | 0.204              | 1.444        | 0.149    | Rejected |
| CSR -> Brand image                | 0.703         | 0.078              | 8.996        | 0.000    | Accepted |
| Brand image -> Performance        | 0.463         | 0.202              | 2.293        | 0.022    | Accepted |
| CSR -> Brand image -> Performance | 0.325         | 0.158              | 2.057        | 0.04     | Accepted |

### Coefficient of Determination ( $R^2$ )

The coefficient of determination indicates the proportion of an endogenous construct's variance that can be accounted for by its predictor construct ( $R^2$ ).  $R$  square values of 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25 are classified as substantial, moderate, and weak, respectively (Hair, et al., 2021). The research indicates that the  $R^2$  value of brand image is 0.494% and performance is 0.492, which are both moderate. This suggests that the independent variable has a variance of 49.4% for brand image and 49.2% for performance.



**Figure1. Path Analysis**

### 3. DISCUSSIONS

The outcome of PLS-SEM shows that corporate social responsibility and the performance of the tourism business don't have a positive or significant relationship. ( $\beta = 0.294$ ,  $p$ -value = 0.149). Furthermore, prior research suggested that CSR and performance have a negative and insignificant relationship (He et al.,2024). Brand image and corporate social responsibility are significantly and positively associated ( $\beta = 0.703$ ,  $p$ -value = 0.000). Additionally, previous study supported that the association between brand image and corporate social responsibility is positive and significant (Phan et al.,2021). Brand image has positive and significant relationship with performance of tourism industry ( $\beta = 0.463$ ,  $p$ -value = 0.022). Also, previous study supported that brand image and performance are positively and significantly associated (Le, 2023). Brand image has mediating effect on CSR and performance of tourism industry ( $\beta = 0.325$ ,  $p$ -value = 0.04).

### 4. CONCLUSION

This research prevails to examine the relationship between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and the performance of tourism enterprises, as well as the mediating impacts of brand image. The key results First, there is no positive and substantial correlation between tourism industry performance and CSR. CSR has a favorable and strong association with Brand image,



secondly. Then, Brand Image has a good and significant relationship with Tourism Industry Performance. Lastly, brand image mediates the relationship between CSR and tourism industry performance.

Therefore, tourism companies should utilize their CSR policies to devote more time and resources to resolving environmental and social concerns and promote their brand. Their best practices can be very beneficial for the Nepalese economy in implementing various CSR policies, programs, and strategies with favorable outcomes.

## 5. IMPLICATION

There are various implications to the findings of this study both in theory and practice in the tourism industry. On a theoretical level, the research enhances the explanation of the effect of CSR on the performance of the enterprises, especially by the mediating variable of brand image. The study in various dimensions assessing CSR, including legal, economic, ethical, philanthropic, and environmental provides the contribution to the wider reading of the literature demonstrating that CSR is not a single activity but a strategic approach that promotes the image and competitiveness in the long-term. This points to the fact that future studies are still required to explore further the multi-dimensional nature of CSR as a construct and to establish its mediating and moderating roles in various cultural and industrial contexts.

To practitioners, the study provides practical knowledge to tourism enterprises in Nepal and elsewhere. The findings indicate that appropriate CSR activities can contribute to brand image to a great extent which subsequently leads to overall business performance. It implies that CSR is not to be viewed as an extra cost or a necessity, it should be viewed as a strategic investment. Some policies obtained by tourism firms to fulfill their social obligations include fair labor practices, community relations, environmental conservation programs, and cultural preservation programs among others, not only to satisfy their social obligations, but also to consolidate their market shares and appeal to socially minded travelers.

At a more general level, this has implications to tourism policy makers and stakeholders. When CSR is incorporated into the tourism policies, it would enhance the development of the national economy, advance sustainable tourism, and enhance the world perception of Nepal as a responsible tourism destination. This process can be facilitated by policymakers through the development of goals, incentives, and recognition mechanism that can persuade businesses to practice CSR more often. In such a manner, CSR not only creates competitiveness within businesses but also serves as a means of creating sustainability in the tourism industry in the long run.

## 6. DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Although this research offers some important information about the connection between the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), the brand image, and the performance of the tourism enterprises, it still contains a number of areas that should be explored further. Future studies must also adopt sector specific studies to get insights into the variation in CSR practices between different branches of the tourism industry including hotels, airlines, trekking agencies and tour operators. In every sector, CSR might focus on different aspects, and locating the differences might provide a better understanding of how responsibility would be converted into brand value and enterprise performance.

The possibility to research CSR communication and transparency is another promising direction. The study of the manner in which tourism businesses communicate their CSR activities and how the stakeholders assess and react to these communications would be valuable in answering the question of whether accountability is significant in developing a brand image and consumer loyalty. Moreover, the study must examine the impetuses behind the managers embracing CSR since decision-making can be informed by the morality, competitive forces, or compliance requirements. The knowledge of these motivations would help the reason the extent of commitment and effectiveness of tourism enterprises is varied.

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