

Review Article

The Role of Altruistic Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in Shaping Graduate Employability in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

The research paper under examination examines the effect of Altruistic Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR) on the employability of final-year university students in Malaysia, informed by Schwartz's Value Theory. The proposed study will employ a mixed-methods approach, sampling 400 students with varying academic backgrounds from both public and private universities, complemented by Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). This study examines the impact of altruistic CSR aspects, including employee welfare, business ethics, environmental sustainability, and community participation in decision-making, on graduates' career choices. These findings suggest that such altruistic CSR qualities hold significant value for students and are indicative of the universalism and benevolence proposed by Schwartz. With the results presented, the research provides useful strategies to guide Malaysian businesses in optimising their corporate social responsibilities in line with the ambitions of the new generation workforce. Also, the study ensures that the intended research will help Malaysia towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the significance of CSR on sustainable growth and talent attraction.

Keywords: Altruistic corporate practices in a social responsibility (CSR), graduate employability, Malaysia, organisational choice, value theory by Schwartz

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INTRODUCTION

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has now become less of a periphery issue to more of a strategic must to the businesses across the world. The stake over CSR has been high in Malaysia because of the increased awareness in ethical business practices and the sustainability objectives

of the development. One of the many dimensions of CSR that have been popular is the altruistic CSR that concentrates on the voluntary aspect of CSR beyond what the regulatory authorities implement. The CSR initiatives that fall under this form of CSR include ethical business conduct, environmental stewardship, employee welfare, and community engagement.

These CSR initiatives are crucial in shaping job preferences among university graduates when they enter the labour market, as shown in Figure 1. Research shows that high-achieving university students are increasingly basing their job prospects on the social responsibility promises made by employers. With increased competition in the Malaysian labour market, graduates look forward to organisations that align with their personal values, which prioritise ethical business activities and employee well-being. When conducted altruistically, CSR is effectively incorporated into corporate policies by employers, making them more

appealing to young individuals in the job market, as it facilitates good employer branding and sustained commercial involvement in human resources.

In this way, with regard to the changing demands of both employers and graduates, the issue of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in determining employment has become a matter of increasing importance. Not only is the employer seeking employees who are good in their technical skill sets, but also employees who have an understanding of the values, ethics, and long-term sustainability objectives of that organisation. Simultaneously, graduates, especially those of Generation Z and millennials, are becoming increasingly interested in joining companies that demonstrate ethical responsibility, environmental sensitivity, and a commitment to social well-being. Companies that adopt altruistic CSR are more often perceived as good employers, as job seekers are increasingly becoming value-driven.

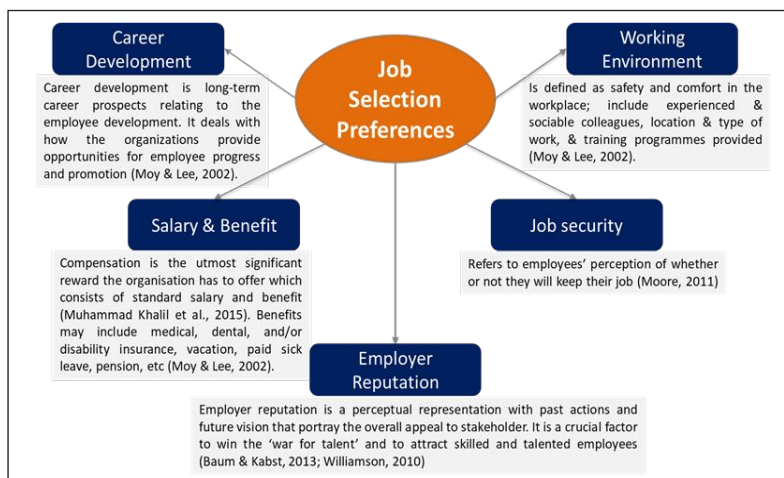


Figure 1. Job selection preferences in Malaysia

Source: Author's own work

As a way of exploring this dynamic, this paper will investigate the effects of altruistic CSR on graduate employability, aligning with Schwartz's Value Theory, which classifies human values into high-level dimensions that predispose an individual towards the development of preferences and behaviours. In particular, the social responsibility, ethical behaviour, and focus on the good ones can be referenced as some of the core job selection determinants like universalism and benevolence. Graduates will be more attracted to organisations that demonstrate such values in their CSR practices, which will create a stronger sense of commitment to the organisation and career satisfaction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The altruistic CSR implies business efforts that do not view social and environmental well-being as integral to corporate-established economic and legal duties.

Contrasting strategies or instrumental CSR, which is mostly motivated by profit status, altruistic CSR represents a moral obligation of a company in society (Carroll & Shabana, 2010). The concept of CSR in Malaysia has been adopted to meet the needs of government policies, corporate governance principles and needs in the society (Ahmad & Saad, 2013). Figure 2 illustrates Malaysia's understanding of CSR, highlighting the company's focus on ethical business performance, environmental and social responsibility, as well as community involvement.

Organisations such as Petronas, Sime Darby, and Maybank have implemented altruistic CSR initiatives, including scholarships, environmental conservation programs, and community empowerment projects. These efforts enhance corporate reputation, strengthen stakeholder relationships, and contribute to long-term sustainability (Moir, 2021).

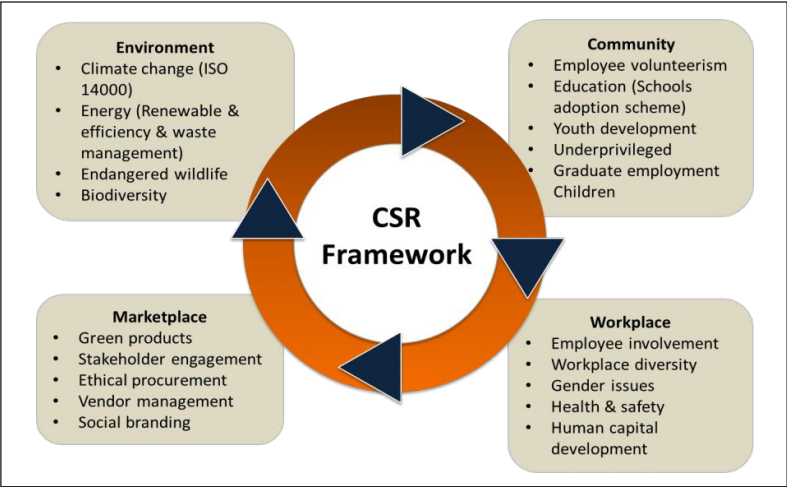


Figure 2. CSR framework by Bursa Malaysia
Source: Author's own work

The CSR Framework by Bursa Malaysia (Figure 2) further underscores the structured approach adopted by corporations, demonstrating how Malaysian businesses integrate CSR into their core strategies.

One of the significant aspects of altruistic CSR is its impact on employer branding and attracting the workforce. Studies indicate that millennials and Generation Z, who form the majority of today's university students, prefer employers who demonstrate ethical responsibility and social commitment (Gillespie, 2024). Companies that actively engage in altruistic CSR foster trust, loyalty, and a positive corporate image, making them more appealing to prospective employees. The essence of CSR, including the principles that define this concept, is attractive to job seekers, as it outlines the core principles that guide socially responsible business.

Graduate employability can be defined as the ability of university graduates to secure and sustain employment that aligns with their qualifications and career objectives. Employability in Malaysia is already a pressing issue due to the growing disparity between industry standards and the skills of graduates (Moo & Da Wan, 2023). At the same time, now employers do not only want personnel with technical skills, but also include soft skills, social knowledge, and the ability to work in changing conditions (Ahmad, M. et al., 2025). The implementation of CSR projects and, especially, programs focused on the welfare of employees and ethical business conduct may amicably contribute to the perception graduates hold of potential employers.

By promoting the well-being of employees and offering them decent wages and a balance between work and life, companies that prioritise employee well-being are likely to attract high-calibre graduates. An example is corporate social responsibility programs that offer internship, mentorship, and professional development opportunities to enhance students' employability (Zain et al., 2021). Community engagement programs also provide students with an opportunity to participate in volunteer work, allowing them to develop leadership skills and social awareness. The CSR Pyramid of Carroll (Figure 3) is a systematic approach to CSR, separating the economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities of organisations that strike the balance between these social impact initiatives.

According to the Value Theory of Schwartz (1992), human values, categorised under ten broad dimensions, are relevant to altruistic CSR, universalism, and benevolence. Universalism is concerned with the welfare of society and the environment, whereas benevolence focuses on being kind, socially responsible, and in a harmonious relationship with others (Schwartz, 2012). These principles align well with humanistic CSR, as companies focusing on sustainability, ethical behaviour, and societal development are in tandem with the expectations and aspirations of graduates.

It has also been shown that younger generations, specifically Generation Z and millennials, want to work in organisations that align with their values (Twenge, 2017).

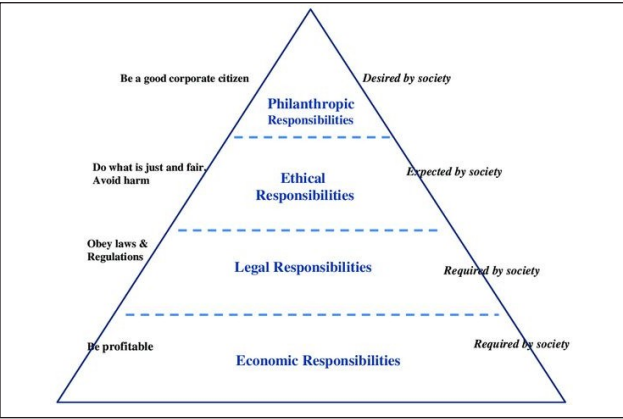


Figure 3. The Carroll’s CSR pyramid
Source: Carroll (1991)

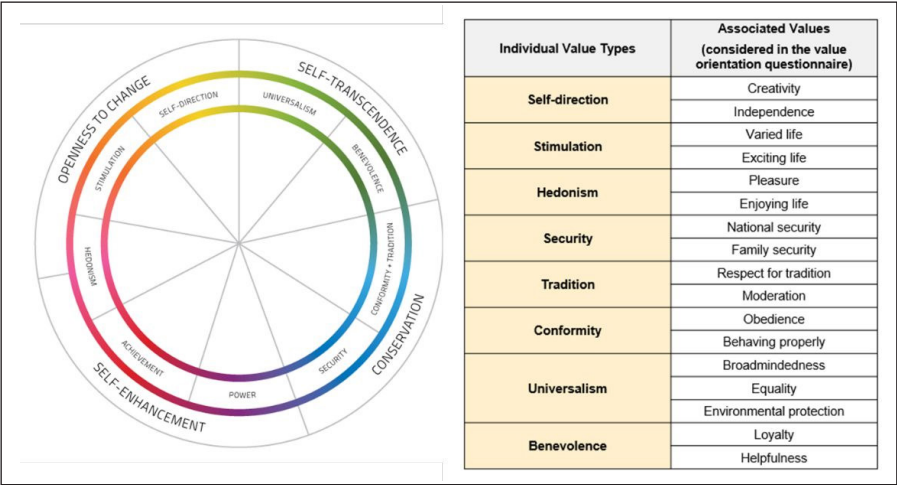


Figure 4. Schwartz values theory
Source: Schwartz (1994)

When firms demonstrate their commitment to universalism and philanthropy through their CSR activities, they attract value-oriented job seekers, thereby enhancing their talent recruitment efforts. Also, when the Value Theory (Figure 4) developed by Schwartz is integrated into CSR strategies, ethical business behaviour is strengthened, which helps to achieve long-term organisational success and social well-being.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a concept that has gained increasing acceptance as a means of enhancing corporate competitiveness and achieving social impact in Malaysia. The business is advised to conduct socially responsible actions in accordance with governmental policies, including the Malaysian Code on Corporate Governance (MCCG) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Amir et al., 2025).

Malaysian corporations have responded by incorporating Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) into their business models, focusing on sustainability, corporate ethics, and human capital investment.

As a country with multicultural diversity and a rapidly evolving economy, Malaysia offers a unique environment for investing in the role of altruistic CSR in specialised employment preferences (Hizam et al., 2019). In the increasingly competitive marketplace where talent firms operate, CSR commitments are now a significant consideration in job seekers' decisions. According to a study conducted by Moorthy et al. (2017), Malaysian students value the promises of employers with regard to their CSR-related employer when assessing employment opportunities concerning job opportunities. Companies with a good reputation for being socially responsible tend to receive more applications from recent graduates. In addition, employee turnover in CSR-driven companies is lower, as employees experience a sense of belonging and purpose in ethical and community-oriented work environments (Ahmad and Ramayah, 2022). These insights reveal the growing role of CSR in shaping the employment landscape in Malaysia.

The crucible of altruistic CSR and graduate employability is prompting Malaysian businesses to adopt social responsibility. When companies demonstrate a higher level of employer branding by valuing business ethics, treating employees well, and engaging in community

involvement, they become more appealing to valuable graduates. The connection between CSR and talent acquisition is further justified by the engagement of the Value Theory developed by Schwartz, with organisations that correspond to universalism and benevolence being likely to attract and retain the top talent. In its constant influence on the labour market, a business should understand the strategic significance of CSR in developing sustainable development and enhancing the competitiveness of its workforce.

The expectations of the future workforce generation in the nation are also changing as the nation advances in its sustainable development endeavours. Young professionals, the upcoming potential employees, are also placing more demands on their employers. They expect employers who not only provide them with a career opportunity but also demonstrate adherence to a certain level of ethical practices, social responsibility, and stability. Although interest in CSR has increased, few studies have been done to discuss the impact that altruistic CSR has on employment preferences among Malaysian graduates. This relationship is crucial in understanding how businesses can attract and retain talent in a growing, value-based labour marketplace.

This research will examine the implications of altruistic CSR on the employability perceptions of final-year university students in Malaysia. Based on the conceptual framework of the Value Theory suggested by Schwartz,

the study investigates the influence of particular altruistic aspects of CSR, including employee welfare, moral business policies, environmental responsibility and involvement with the community, on the job choices of graduates. By conducting research to produce empirical data on the significance of these CSR attributes in the Malaysian context, the study will also provide practical insights to organisations intending to integrate their CSR approaches in line with the values and expectations of the future workforce.

METHODOLOGY

This paper presents a mixed-methods study that combines both quantitative and qualitative designs to conduct a comprehensive investigation into the relationship between altruistic Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and perceptions of employability among final-year university students in Malaysia.

The quantitative stage involved a survey of 400 final-year students from various Malaysian universities. The survey measured the relevance of four primary altruistic CSR factors towards influencing the employment preferences among students (Figure 5).

The data gathered from the survey were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical tools to determine what students prefer to see in CSR, as well as to examine demographic variables that may influence the opinions of the study participants.

The qualitative stage followed the quantitative stage and consisted of four (4) Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), each comprising six (6) participants, resulting in a total of twenty-four (24) participants. The FGDs were also intended to gain further insight into the motivation and image of students for altruistic CSR and their underlying values. The discussions were structured around the key themes revealed in the survey results, which highlighted the importance of CSR in employment decisions among students, making the understanding of the role of CSR in a job very delicate.

Through the fusion of quantitative and qualitative methods, the research can facilitate a comprehensive approach to understanding the perceptions and values of Malaysian graduates regarding CSR and its importance in career choice. The outcomes are highly informative regarding the applications of companies, which should

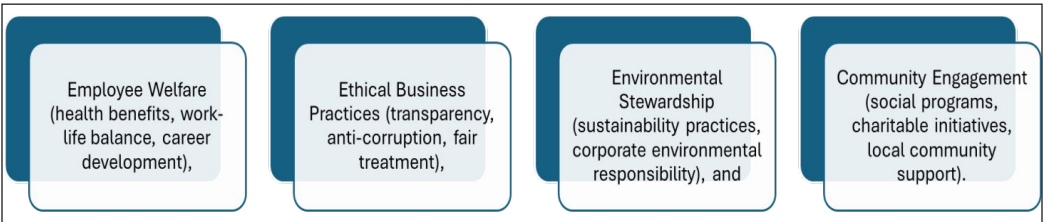


Figure 5. Four key altruistic CSR elements
Source: Author’s own work

harmonise their CSR strategies by stating the requirements and principles of future employees.

RESULTS

This section presents the research results of investigating the role of the altruistic Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) variables, employee welfare, business ethics, environmental management and community interaction in the oil and gas job decision-making process of the Malaysian graduates. In this analysis, both quantitative and qualitative data were merged based on a survey of 400 final-year students from both public and private universities, as well as information gathered through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs).

More precisely, the findings reveal the extent to which students evaluate these areas of CSR when defining potential employers, ranking them in accordance with the values of universalism and benevolence as outlined by Schwartz. It also addresses the fluctuation of CSRs' preferences across various academic bodies and types of universities, providing input into future employee expectations of the Malaysian workforce. In addition, the results are explained in terms of the Malaysian Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) concerning the contribution that CSR makes to sustainable employment and corporate ethics.

The section is divided as follows: First, the demographic profile of the survey respondents and FGD participants is provided to define the sample features of the study. Subsequently, the survey data demonstrate the ranking of priorities

across diverse CSR attributes, which can be validated using statistical methods, to determine differences between student groups. This is then supplemented by qualitative data from FGDs, which would give a more detailed discourse on students' motivation and expectations of CSR in the work environment. Conclusively, the implications from discussions with the literature are presented, along with the Schwartz value theory, SDG goals in Malaysia, and a healthy professional conclusion and strategic projections for publicity organisations willing to implement measures to attract and retain young talents with improved CSR.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

In this section, the demographic details of the 400 survey participants, including gender, age, type of university, and academic major, will be presented. As well, the demographics of the members of the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) are described to obtain the context of the obtained qualitative information.

Survey Respondents

The survey was applied to 400 final-year students of six state universities and four private universities in Malaysia. Their demographics are presented in Table 1.

Most of the respondents were female (62.5%), while male respondents accounted for 37.5%. This represents an increase in the enrolment of women in institutions of higher learning in Malaysia. The respondents' mean age was 23.1 years ($SD = 1.2$), and they were between 22 and 25 years old.

Four hundred respondents, out of a total of 400, were from public universities, with 67.5% and 32.5% from private universities, respectively. Speaking of academic discipline, 56.0% of respondents belonged to the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) sector, and 44.0% belonged to non-STEM sectors, providing adequate representation for the views of both technical and social science representatives.

Table 1
Demographic profile of survey respondents

Demographic Factor	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	150	37.5
Female	250	62.5
Age Group (Years)		
22	120	30.0
23	160	40.0
24	80	20.0
25	40	10.0
University Type		
Public University	270	67.5
Private University	130	32.5
Academic Discipline		
STEM	224	56.0
Non-STEM	176	44.0
(N=400)		

Source: Author’s own work

Table 2
Composition of FGD participants

Focus Group	University Type	Academic Discipline	Number of Participants
FGD 1	Public	STEM	6
FGD 2	Public	Non-STEM	6
FGD 3	Private	STEM	6
FGD 4	Private	Non-STEM	6
Total	-	-	24

Source: Author’s own work

FGD Participants

Table 2 displays the composition of four FGDs, which included twenty-four (24) students, with each session consisting of six participants representing different academic disciplines and university types. The FGDs aimed to research students' perceptions of CSR in job selection as a complement to the quantitative results.

Summary of Demographic Findings

The study encompasses a diverse range of perspectives, as its demographic profile of respondents is a comprehensive representation of Malaysian university students. The overwhelming female representation is consistent with the larger gender balance in higher education in Malaysia. The similarity in the distribution of both STEM and non-STEM students will enable significant comparisons between the CSR-related employment preferences. In a similar manner, the inclusion of students in both Princeton University and the Pakistani University guarantees the occurrence of differences within the contexts of the institutions.

Importance of Altruistic CSR Elements in Employment Preferences

The purpose of this section is to observe the status that employee welfare, business ethics, and community awareness had on the employment preferences among Malaysian university students. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation and frequency distributions) are applied to analyse the data ranking CSR elements by their rank of importance. In addition, statistical tests (ANOVA, t-tests, and chi-square tests) are employed to evaluate differences based on gender, type of university (public and private), and discipline (STEM and non-STEM universities).

Descriptive Statistics for CSR Elements

Figure 6 depicts the significance of CSR elements in choosing jobs, and the way Malaysian university students value various CSR elements when seeking employment opportunities.

The findings show the factors of employee welfare are ranked highest

($M = 4.35$, $SD = 0.78$), ethical business practices ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 0.85$), environmental stewardship ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 0.91$), and community involvement ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 1.02$). This indicates that Malaysian graduates attach increased importance to companies that distinguish themselves by their well-developed employee welfare practices, such as high wages, job security, and workplace conditions.

Thematic Insights from FGDs: Why Do Graduates Prioritise These CSR Elements?

To complement the quantitative findings, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted to gain deeper insights into why Malaysian graduates prioritise specific CSR elements when considering employment opportunities. Thematic analysis was employed to identify key themes from participant responses. Three major themes emerged:

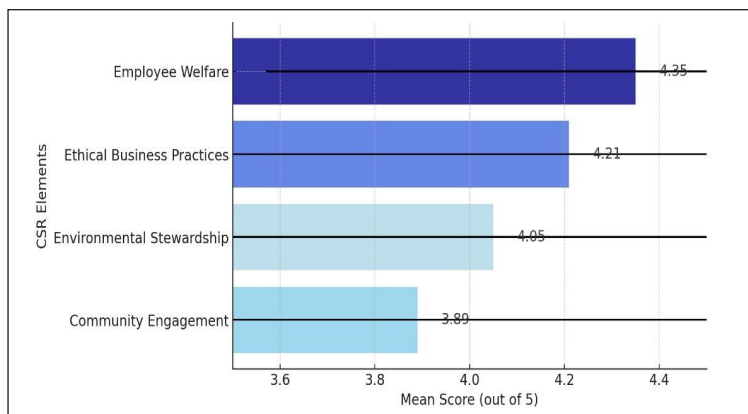


Figure 6. CSR elements in employment preferences

Source: Author's own work

Alignment with Personal Values (Universalism and Benevolence)

Participants consistently emphasised that their employment preferences align with their personal values, particularly universalism and benevolence, as outlined in Schwartz's Value Theory. Many expressed that they seek employers who contribute positively to society, treating employees fairly and ensuring ethical business conduct.

Representative Quotes:

I want to work for a company that truly values its employees and treats them well. It's not just about salary but also respect and fairness. (Participant A, Public University)

Companies that support social causes and employee welfare reflect values that I personally uphold. (Participant B, Private University)

Desire for Ethical and Sustainable Workplaces

A strong desire for ethical and sustainable workplaces emerged as a common theme. Participants highlighted concerns about unethical business practices, unsustainable environmental policies, and exploitative labour conditions. They expressed a preference for organisations committed to fair trade, eco-friendly initiatives, and employee well-being.

Representative Quotes:

A company's reputation matters to me. I don't want to be associated with

businesses that exploit workers or harm the environment. (Participant C, Private University)

Sustainability is important. Organisations that prioritise the environment show that they care about the future. (Participant D, Public University)

Perceptions of Corporate Responsibility and Employer Attractiveness

Graduates perceived CSR-driven companies as more attractive employers, believing that businesses with strong CSR initiatives foster positive workplace cultures, job satisfaction, and long-term career growth. Many participants stated that an organisation's CSR efforts influence their perception of job stability, employee treatment, and leadership integrity.

Representative Quotes:

Companies that genuinely care about their employees and the community are usually better places to work. (Participant E, Public University)

An employer's CSR efforts tell me a lot about their leadership and values. It's an indicator of how they'll treat employees. (Participant F, Private University)

Statistical Analysis: The Impact of CSR Perceptions on Employer Attractiveness

To further examine the relationship between the importance of CSR and employer

attractiveness, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted. The results indicate a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.992$, $p = 0.008$), suggesting that graduates who highly value CSR elements are more likely to find companies with strong CSR commitments attractive as employers.

These findings reinforce the qualitative insights from FGDs, demonstrating that organisations that actively engage in CSR initiatives are perceived as more attractive workplaces by Malaysian graduates. The preference for CSR-driven employers suggests that companies integrating CSR into their corporate identity can gain a competitive edge in attracting top talent.

The scatter plot (Figure 7) visualises the correlation between CSR importance and employer attractiveness. The trend line (red dashed line) indicates a strong positive relationship, reinforcing that graduates perceive organisations with strong CSR commitments as more attractive employers.

Comparative Analysis: Alignment with Schwartz's Universalism and Benevolence Values

The study findings demonstrate a strong alignment between graduates' employment preferences and Schwartz's value dimensions of universalism and benevolence. Universalism emphasises social justice, equality, and environmental protection, while benevolence highlights concern for others' well-being and ethical conduct.

Alignment with Universalism: Ethical and Sustainable Employment Preferences

Survey results in Table 3 indicate that Employee Welfare ($M = 4.35$) and Ethical Business Practices ($M = 4.20$) were the two most prioritised CSR elements among Malaysian graduates. These findings align with universalistic values, where individuals seek fair treatment, inclusivity, and ethical leadership in their workplace choices.

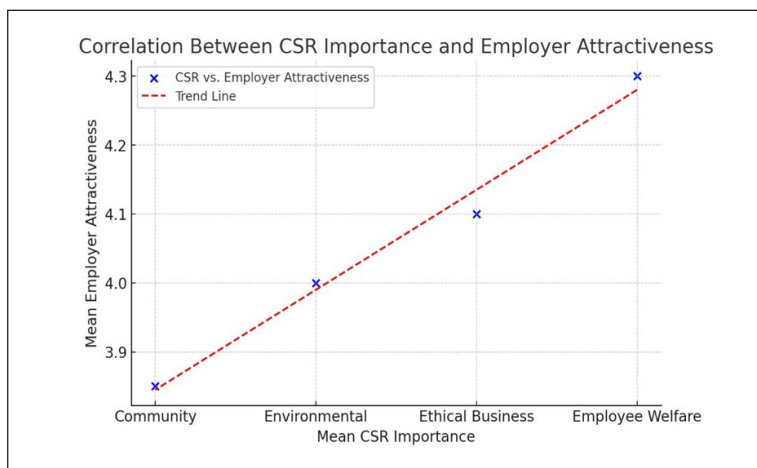


Figure 7. CSR importance and employer attractiveness
Source: Author's own work

Table 3
Correlation between CSR importance and employer attractiveness

CSR Element	Mean CSR Importance	Mean Employer Attractiveness
Employee Welfare	4.35	4.30
Ethical Business Practices	4.20	4.10
Environmental Stewardship	4.05	4.00
Community Engagement	3.90	3.85

Source: Author’s own work

Supporting FGD Insights

Participants emphasised the importance of working for organisations that uphold strong ethical standards and sustainable practices. Many respondents viewed ethical business conduct as a reflection of corporate integrity and long-term sustainability.

Representative Quotes:

I want to work for a company that respects all employees equally and operates ethically. If they care about people, they’ll care about their workers too. (Participant G, Public University)

A company that engages in sustainable practices and treats employees well shows that they think long-term, not just about profits. (Participant H, Private University)

Alignment with Benevolence: Community Engagement and Employee Welfare

Graduates also rated Community Engagement (M = 3.90) as an important

CSR element, reflecting benevolence values that emphasise care for others. The preference for employee welfare (M = 4.35) further supports this, suggesting that graduates seek workplaces that prioritise well-being, inclusivity, and employee support systems.

Supporting FGD Insights

Several FGD participants mentioned that they prefer organisations that engage in social initiatives, such as supporting underprivileged communities, volunteering programmes, and education sponsorships. They believe such companies foster a more compassionate and purpose-driven workplace culture.

Representative Quotes:

Companies that care about the community often care about their employees too. It creates a culture of kindness and support. (Participant I, Public University)

Giving back to society is important. If a company does this, I know they have strong values, which means they’ll treat employees well too. (Participant J, Private University)

Broader Societal Shifts Toward Ethical and Sustainable Work Environments

The findings reflect a broader societal shift in Malaysia toward ethical business practices, sustainability, and corporate responsibility. As younger generations enter the workforce, they bring with them higher expectations for

corporate social responsibility. The demand for transparent, socially responsible, and employee-centred organisations is growing, pushing companies to adapt their CSR strategies to attract and retain talent.

These insights suggest that Malaysian organisations aiming to align with the values of future graduates should emphasise CSR strategies that reflect universalism and benevolence—focusing on fair employee treatment, ethical conduct, sustainability, and active community engagement.

Figure 8 shows the alignment of CSR elements with Schwartz’s Universalism and Benevolence values.

- Universalism (blue bars): Reflects graduates' preference for ethical, fair, and sustainable workplaces.
- Benevolence (green bars): Highlights the importance placed on employee welfare and community engagement.

This visualisation reinforces that graduates expect companies to uphold social responsibility not only in business ethics but also in employee treatment and community care.

CSR Strategies for Malaysian Organisations: Bridging Student Expectations and Corporate Practices

The findings demonstrate increasing expectations among Malaysian graduates of ethical behaviour, social responsibility, and a people-friendly work environment. Nevertheless, there are still defaults in these expectations over the present CSR practices of most Malaysian organisations. This subsection examines these gaps, provides strategic suggestions, and explains the relevance of such initiatives to the Malaysian Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

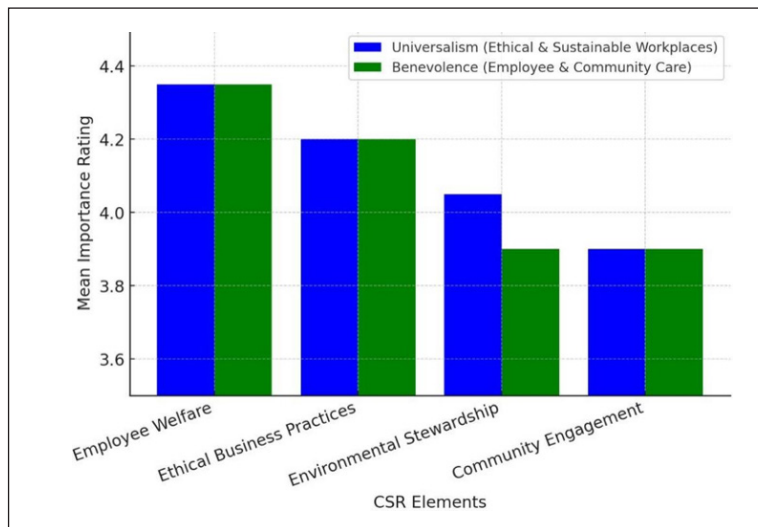


Figure 8. Alignment of CSR elements with Schwartz’s values

Source: Author’s own work

Gaps Between Student Expectations and Current CSR Practices

Figure 9 demonstrates the four (4) key gaps as identified from the study. Although prominent Malaysian corporates, especially GLCs and multinational companies, are well-endowed with CSR frameworks, most companies continue to focus on philanthropic CSR one-off donations, sponsorships instead of integrating CSR as a corporate culture, employee policy and business ethics.



Figure 9. Key gaps identified
Source: Author’s own work

Recommendations to Enhance CSR Strategies for Talent Attraction and Retention

As a way of addressing these gaps, Malaysian organisations should redesign their CSR programs to align with student expectations, ensuring long-term sustainability rather than intermittent CSR campaigns.

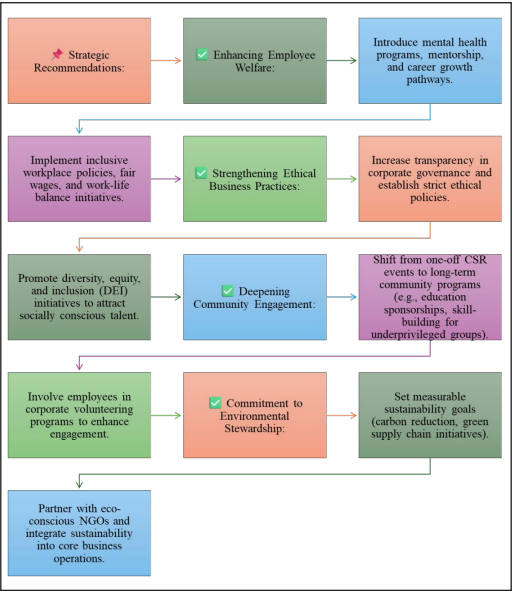


Figure 10. Strategic recommendations
Source: Author’s own work

Alignment with Malaysia’s Social Development Goals (SDGs)

These CSR strategies align with various SDGs, implying that the organisations help the country develop and also achieve the hopes of young, future talent, as shown in Table 4.

Since young talent needs to be required and retained within the Malaysian organisation, firms must extend beyond traditional CSR behaviours and incorporate ethical, people-based, and sustainable practices into their corporate DNA. By doing so, they not only address the expectations of graduates but also contribute to the country's achievement of the SDGs, fostering a stronger corporate future and increasing accountability for future generations.

Table 4
SDG goal and CSR strategy contribution

SDG Goal	CSR Strategy Contribution
SDG 8: Decent Work & Economic Growth	Enhancing employee welfare, fair wages, and ethical workplace practices.
SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities	Promoting inclusive hiring, gender equality, and fair labour policies.
SDG 12: Responsible Consumption & Production	Encouraging sustainable business models and environmental responsibility.
SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals	Strengthening collaborations with government, NGOs, and universities.

Source: Author’s own work

DISCUSSION

This study examined the role of altruistic Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in shaping perceptions of graduate employability among final-year university students in Malaysia. By integrating quantitative survey findings with qualitative insights from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), the discussion interprets how specific CSR dimensions influence employment preferences and how these preferences align with Schwartz’s Value Theory, particularly universalism and benevolence.

Altruistic CSR as a Determinant of Employer Attractiveness

The findings indicate that altruistic CSR plays a significant role in shaping graduates’ perceptions of employer attractiveness. Among the CSR elements examined, employee welfare and ethical business

practices were found to be the most influential factors in job selection decisions. This suggests that Malaysian graduates increasingly prioritise organisations that demonstrate genuine concern for employee well-being, fairness, and ethical conduct. These results are consistent with earlier studies, which highlight that CSR-driven organisations are perceived as more trustworthy and desirable employers, particularly among younger generations entering the workforce.

The strong positive correlation between CSR importance and employer attractiveness further reinforces the argument that CSR is no longer viewed as a peripheral organisational activity but as a core signal of corporate values. Graduates interpret CSR initiatives as indicators of how organisations are likely to treat their employees, manage ethical challenges, and sustain long-term employment relationships.

Alignment with Schwartz’s Universalism and Benevolence Values

The results demonstrate a clear alignment between graduates’ employment preferences and Schwartz’s value dimensions of universalism and benevolence. Universalism, which emphasises social justice, equality, and environmental protection, is reflected in graduates’ strong preference for ethical business practices and environmental stewardship. Benevolence, which focuses on concern for others’ well-being, is evident in the high importance placed on employee welfare and community engagement.

The qualitative findings from FGDs provide deeper insight into this alignment. Participants consistently expressed a desire to work for organisations that share their personal values, contribute positively to society, and uphold ethical standards. These findings support Schwartz's assertion that values serve as guiding principles influencing individual attitudes and behaviours, including career-related decisions. In this context, altruistic CSR functions as a mechanism through which organisational values are communicated and evaluated by prospective employees.

Generational Expectations and Ethical Work Environments

The study's findings reflect broader generational shifts in employment expectations among Generation Z and millennials. Graduates demonstrated heightened sensitivity toward ethical issues, sustainability, and corporate accountability. Rather than focusing solely on salary or job security, participants emphasised the importance of meaningful work, ethical leadership, and organisational purpose.

This shift aligns with previous research suggesting that younger generations seek employment that offers both professional development and value congruence. Organisations that engage in altruistic CSR are perceived not only as socially responsible but also as providing healthier, more supportive, and more sustainable work environments. Consequently, CSR becomes a strategic tool for attracting and retaining talent in an increasingly values-driven labour market.

CSR, Graduate Employability, and the Malaysian Context

Within the Malaysian context, the findings underscore the increasing importance of CSR in addressing challenges to graduate employability. As Malaysian graduates face increasing competition and evolving employer expectations, CSR-oriented organisations offer additional value through opportunities such as skill development programs, community engagement, and ethical workplace cultures.

The emphasis on employee welfare and ethical practices resonates strongly with national priorities outlined in the Malaysian Code on Corporate Governance (MCCG) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By aligning CSR strategies with these frameworks, organisations contribute not only to talent attraction but also to broader societal goals such as decent work, reduced inequalities, and sustainable economic growth.

Bridging the Gap Between Expectations and Practice

Despite the positive perception of CSR among graduates, the findings also reveal a gap between student expectations and current CSR practices in many Malaysian organisations. While large corporations and government-linked companies often demonstrate structured CSR initiatives, smaller firms tend to focus on short-term or philanthropic activities rather than embedding CSR into organisational culture and human resource policies.

This gap suggests a need for Malaysian organisations to move beyond symbolic CSR and adopt more integrated, employee-centred approaches. Embedding altruistic CSR into recruitment, training, and employee welfare policies can enhance employer credibility and strengthen long-term workforce sustainability.

Implications for Theory and Practice

From a theoretical perspective, this study reinforces the relevance of Schwartz's Value Theory in understanding employment preferences and extends its application to CSR and graduate employability research. Practically, the findings suggest that organisations seeking to attract young talent should prioritise altruistic CSR elements that resonate with universalism and benevolence, particularly employee welfare, ethical conduct, sustainability, and community engagement.

Overall, the discussion underscores that altruistic CSR is not merely a reputational tool but a strategic driver that shapes graduates' career decisions and the future of work in Malaysia.

CONCLUSION

This paper highlights the importance of altruistic CSR aspects, such as employee welfare, ethical business conduct, environmental sustainability, and community involvement, in determining the employment choices of Malaysian

graduates. The results of the mixed-methods approach show that these qualities of CSR are largely consistent with the values of universalism and benevolence found in Schwartz's theory, responding to a growing belief in ethical, sustainable, and socially responsible workplace practices among the future workforces.

The survey results highlight that graduates prioritise employee welfare and ethical business practices as the most critical factors in evaluating potential employers, while environmental stewardship and community engagement also play influential roles. The FGDs provide deeper insights into the motivations behind these preferences, revealing themes such as personal value alignment, the desire for ethical workplaces, and perceptions of corporate responsibility as a factor in employer attractiveness.

Despite these expectations, the study identifies gaps between student priorities and current CSR practices in many Malaysian organisations. While some companies, particularly GLCs and multinational firms, demonstrate robust CSR strategies, others continue to focus on philanthropic CSR rather than integrating social responsibility into corporate policies and workplace culture.

To address these gaps, this study proposes strategic recommendations (Figure 11) for organisations to restructure CSR initiatives.

By aligning CSR strategies with Malaysia's Social Development Goals

Enhancing	Enhancing employee welfare through fair wages, career development programs, and mental health support.
Strengthening	Strengthening ethical business practices by promoting transparency, diversity, and corporate accountability.
Deepening	Deepening community engagement with long-term, impact-driven programs.
Committing	Committing to environmental sustainability through green policies and eco-conscious initiatives.

Figure 11. Strategic recommendations for restructuring CSR initiatives
Source: Author’s own work

(SDGs), particularly in sustainable employment, corporate ethics, and environmental responsibility, organisations can bridge the gap between expectations and practices, ensuring they attract and retain socially conscious graduates who seek purpose-driven careers.

This study contributes to both theoretical and practical knowledge by providing insights into how CSR influences graduate employment preferences and its implications for corporate recruitment and talent management strategies. Figure 12 displays that future research can expand on this work by:

Ultimately, this study reinforces the growing importance of CSR in shaping the future of work in Malaysia, highlighting the need for organisations to move beyond traditional CSR frameworks and embrace employee-centric, ethical, and sustainable corporate strategies to attract the next generation of talent.

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Examining	Investigating	Exploring
Examining CSR perceptions across different industries to assess sector-specific variations.	Investigating how CSR communication strategies (e.g., employer branding, social media campaigns) influence graduate perceptions and job applications.	Exploring the longitudinal impact of CSR-driven employment choices, assessing whether graduates remain committed to organizations that uphold these values.

Figure 12. Suggestion for future research
Source: Author’s own work

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