

Exploring the Mediating Role of Organizational Commitment in the Relationship between Corporate Social Responsibility and Employee Performance: Evidence from Henan's Universities

ABSTRACT

Aims: This study aims to examine the mediating role of organizational commitment in the relationship between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and employee performance within Henan's universities, highlighting the strategic importance of CSR in enhancing organizational effectiveness and employee outcomes.

Study design: This study utilized a cross-sectional survey methodology to explore the relationships among Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Organizational Commitment (OC), and Employee Performance (EP) within Henan's higher education sector. A stratified random sampling approach was employed to select faculty and administrative staff from universities engaged in CSR initiatives. The analysis, conducted through Structural Equation Modeling and mediation analysis, aimed to understand both direct and indirect effects of CSR on employee performance, with a particular focus on the mediating role of organizational commitment.

Place and Duration of Study: Zhengzhou University, Henan University, Henan Normal University, Henan Agricultural University and Henan Polytechnic University, in December 2023.

Methodology: The study adopted a quantitative research design using a cross-sectional survey method to explore CSR's impact on organizational commitment and employee performance in Henan's universities. A stratified random sampling strategy was utilized to select faculty and administrative staff from universities engaged in CSR, aiming for a sample size of 328 to ensure statistical significance. Validated scales measured CSR, organizational commitment, and employee performance, with data analysis conducted through Structural Equation Modeling and bootstrapping for mediation effects.

Results: In this study, the impact of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) on Employee Performance (EP) and Organizational Commitment (OC) within Henan's universities was examined. Findings indicate that CSR positively influences EP both directly and via OC, serving as a mediator. Significant relationships were confirmed: CSR to EP ($\beta=0.433$), CSR to OC ($\beta=0.825$), and OC to EP ($\beta=0.442$), all highly statistically significant ($p<0.001$). Mediation analysis showed CSR impacts EP through OC, accounting for about 45.73% of the effect. This underscores CSR's dual role in enhancing performance directly and by fostering organizational commitment.

Conclusion: This study not only underscores the pivotal role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in enhancing employee performance within Henan's universities but also sheds light on the crucial mediating role of Organizational Commitment (OC). The dual pathway through which CSR influences employee performance underlines the significance of integrating CSR into the core strategic management practices of educational institutions. It signals to university administrators and policy-makers that CSR initiatives are not just external obligations but essential strategies for cultivating a committed and high-

performing workforce. This realization opens up avenues for universities to re-evaluate and strengthen their CSR strategies, ensuring they are aligned with both organizational goals and employee values. Moreover, it encourages educational institutions to view CSR as a lever for organizational improvement and a bridge to deeper engagement with employees, ultimately contributing to the advancement of educational quality and societal contributions.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility; Organizational Commitment; Employee Performance; Higher Education; Henan's Universities

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is fundamental in strategic management, advocating for organizations to pursue societal welfare beyond profit goals (Nicole et al., 2022). This is particularly relevant in universities, where CSR enhances both external perceptions and internal efficiency, significantly impacting employee performance and, consequently, the quality of education and research. Aguinis and Glavas (2019) highlight CSR's role in elevating educational institutions' effectiveness, indicating its importance in academic excellence.

CSR's impact on organizational performance is complex, involving various dynamics such as organizational commitment—a psychological state denoting an employee's loyalty to their organization, which affects job satisfaction, retention, and performance (Rachman, 2022). However, the role of organizational commitment in mediating CSR's effect on employee performance, especially in Henan's universities, remains underexplored. Henan's unique socio-cultural and regulatory context provides a rich setting for examining CSR's influence on organizational commitment and performance (Zhu & Zhang, 2015).

This study investigates the mediating role of organizational commitment in the CSR-performance relationship within Henan's academic context, aiming to enhance understanding of CSR's operational benefits and its potential to improve employee performance through increased organizational commitment. It seeks to reveal how CSR initiatives can strengthen psychological bonds within universities, thereby boosting performance metrics.

Additionally, this research has significant practical implications, informing policy and strategic management decisions in educational institutions. By exploring how CSR affects employee performance through organizational commitment, it offers guidelines for university administrators and policymakers, advocating for CSR's integration into educational institutions' strategic frameworks. This approach underlines CSR's role in not only improving societal image but also in fostering a committed and high-performing internal environment.

Overall, this study extends beyond examining CSR's external advantages, focusing on its strategic relevance for internal stakeholder engagement and performance in the university context. By situating the analysis within Henan's distinctive educational landscape, it contributes uniquely to the academic discourse on CSR's comprehensive impact in academia, underscoring CSR's effectiveness as a strategic management tool that enhances universities' societal contributions and operational excellence.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION TO CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR)

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is defined as corporations' duty to support societal welfare beyond economic and legal obligations (Carroll, 1991). Originating in the early 20th century, CSR has evolved to include environmental sustainability, social equity, and economic development alongside traditional philanthropy and ethical labor practices (Carroll & Shabana, 2010). This shift acknowledges the deep interplay between businesses and their societal environments.

Theoretical frameworks like Stakeholder Theory and Social Contract Theory underlie CSR, arguing that companies owe duties to all stakeholders—not just shareholders—and must act in the common good to justify their operational and profit-making activities (Freeman, 1984). These theories highlight the ethical and strategic bases for CSR.

In higher education, CSR manifests uniquely as universities engage in addressing societal challenges via education, research, and community involvement (Hayter & Cahoy, 2018). Initiatives range from sustainable operations to diversity policies and ethical research, enhancing the institution's reputation, attracting students, and fostering community (Aithal

&Aithal, 2023). Thus, CSR in academia is crucial for societal progress and the reinforcement of educational missions and values.

2.2 CSR AND ITS IMPACT ON EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE

Empirical research underscores a positive correlation between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and employee performance, suggesting that CSR initiatives can enhance job satisfaction, commitment, and productivity. Studies have shown that employees tend to exhibit higher levels of engagement and performance when they perceive their organization as socially responsible (Glavas, 2016). Theoretical frameworks such as Social Identity Theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) and Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984) provide insights into how CSR influences employee outcomes. Social Identity Theory posits that employees derive pride and self-esteem from their organization's CSR activities, which in turn enhances their identification with the company and motivates them to contribute to its success. Stakeholder Theory emphasizes the importance of balancing the interests of all stakeholders, including employees, which can lead to a more motivated and committed workforce.

Comparative analysis of CSR's impact across different sectors reveals varying degrees of influence on employee performance, with the education sector presenting unique dynamics. Unlike in profit-driven industries, where CSR often directly correlates with employee motivation due to perceived corporate integrity (Xiong et al., 2023), the impact in the education sector is nuanced by its inherent value-driven mission. Employees in education, particularly in universities, may already align with the institution's social and educational goals, thus the effect of CSR on their performance might be mediated by factors such as organizational support and the alignment of CSR initiatives with academic values (Peterson, 2018).

2.3 ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Organizational Commitment (OC) represents an individual's psychological attachment to their organization, encompassing their willingness to exert effort on behalf of the organization, desire to maintain membership, and belief in and acceptance of organizational values (Meyer & Allen, 1991). This construct is multidimensional, comprising affective commitment (AC), continuance commitment (CC), and normative commitment (NC). AC reflects the emotional attachment and identification with the organization, CC pertains to the perceived costs associated with leaving the organization, and NC involves a feeling of obligation to remain with the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990).

The theoretical underpinnings of OC suggest it significantly influences employee behavior and performance. Affective commitment is posited to enhance performance by fostering a strong identification with organizational goals and values, leading to higher motivation and effort levels (Asif et al., 2019). Continuance commitment influences behavior through the cost-benefit analysis of job change, which can affect turnover rates but may not directly enhance performance. Normative commitment, driven by a sense of loyalty and duty, can motivate employees to adhere to organizational norms and go beyond basic job requirements (Gitau & Monari, 2019).

Research underscores the relationship between OC and various performance indicators, including job satisfaction, turnover, and organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) (Ramalho Luz et al., 2018). Affective commitment, in particular, has been linked to positive outcomes such as increased OCBs, lower absenteeism, and higher productivity, suggesting that employees with a strong emotional attachment to their organization are more likely to exhibit behaviors that exceed their formal job requirements (Grego-Planer, 2019).

2.4 THE MEDIATING ROLE OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

The literature elucidates the pivotal role of Organizational Commitment (OC) as a mediator in the nexus between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and various organizational outcomes, including employee performance, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Albrecht et al., 2015). Studies have consistently demonstrated that OC significantly influences the extent to which employees internalize and reflect corporate values in their work performance and organizational identification (Lee & Kim, 2023).

Central to understanding the mediating effect of OC on the relationship between CSR and employee performance is the application of motivational theories and social exchange theory. From the perspective of motivational theories, CSR initiatives can enhance employee motivation by fulfilling their need for meaningful work, thereby fostering a deeper commitment to the organization (Zhu et al., 2023). This heightened sense of purpose can translate into improved performance as employees are more engaged and aligned with organizational goals.

Social exchange theory further underpins this mediation pathway by positing that CSR practices cultivate a positive organizational climate, characterized by trust and reciprocity. Employees perceive CSR efforts as organizational support, engendering a sense of obligation to reciprocate through increased commitment and performance (Manzoor et al., 2023). This reciprocal exchange solidifies the mediating role of OC, as employees committed to their organization are more likely to go above and beyond in their roles, enhancing overall performance (Peng et al., 2023).

Empirical studies corroborate this mediating role of OC, indicating that CSR initiatives indirectly influence employee performance by nurturing organizational commitment (Alkhadraet al., 2022). Such findings underscore the importance of CSR in cultivating an organizational environment that promotes commitment and, consequently, superior performance outcomes.

2.5 CSR, ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT, AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE IN UNIVERSITIES

The university setting, characterized by its unique blend of academic freedom, diverse stakeholders, and a mission-driven approach, presents both challenges and opportunities for CSR initiatives. Universities, with their dual role in knowledge creation and dissemination, are uniquely positioned to integrate CSR into their core operations, thereby enhancing their social impact and sustainability (Carroll, 1991).

A thorough review of existing literature reveals that CSR activities in universities significantly influence organizational commitment and employee performance. Studies indicate that when universities engage in CSR practices, such as environmental sustainability, community engagement, and ethical governance, they not only contribute to societal well-being but also enhance the commitment and productivity of their faculty and staff (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). This correlation is attributed to the alignment of personal values with organizational goals, leading to increased job satisfaction and loyalty (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

However, the application and outcomes of CSR in universities cannot be wholly understood without considering the cultural and institutional context. In the case of Henan's universities, these factors play a pivotal role. Cultural norms around hierarchy, collective versus individual achievements, and the historical role of universities in Chinese society influence the implementation and perception of CSR activities (Wang & Liu, 2023). Furthermore, the regulatory and policy environment in China provides both supports for and barriers to CSR initiatives, necessitating a nuanced approach to leverage opportunities and navigate challenges (Shah, 2023).

The findings underscore the importance of contextualizing CSR initiatives to align with the specificities of the educational sector and the cultural-institutional landscape of the region. For Henan's universities, this means designing CSR strategies that not only adhere to global best practices but also resonate with local cultural values and policy frameworks. This approach can enhance the efficacy of CSR in fostering organizational commitment and improving employee performance, thereby contributing to the universities' overall mission and societal impact.

2.6 GAPS IN THE LITERATURE AND JUSTIFICATION FOR THE STUDY

The academic examination of organizational commitment within Henan's universities reveals a notable gap in literature, despite extensive research on its effects across various sectors (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Tett & Meyer, 1993). This shortfall is particularly pronounced given the predominance of studies in Western contexts, overlooking the specific dynamics within Chinese academic institutions (Lin & Chang, 2022). The unique socio-cultural and organizational frameworks of Chinese higher education, which could influence the interplay between organizational policies, faculty engagement, and educational outcomes distinctively (Atherton et al., 2018), underline the importance of investigating organizational commitment's mediating role in Henan's universities. The imperative for this research is further heightened by China's higher education sector's evolution, marked by rapid expansion, increased autonomy, and a focus on international competitiveness (Rhoadset al., 2014). This changing landscape necessitates an inquiry into how organizational commitment can be leveraged to navigate these shifts, promoting academic excellence and innovation. The evident lacuna, coupled with the unique context of Henan's universities, underscores the critical need for further exploration to not only bridge the global understanding of organizational commitment in higher education but also to devise strategies enhancing academic outcomes amidst China's educational transformation.

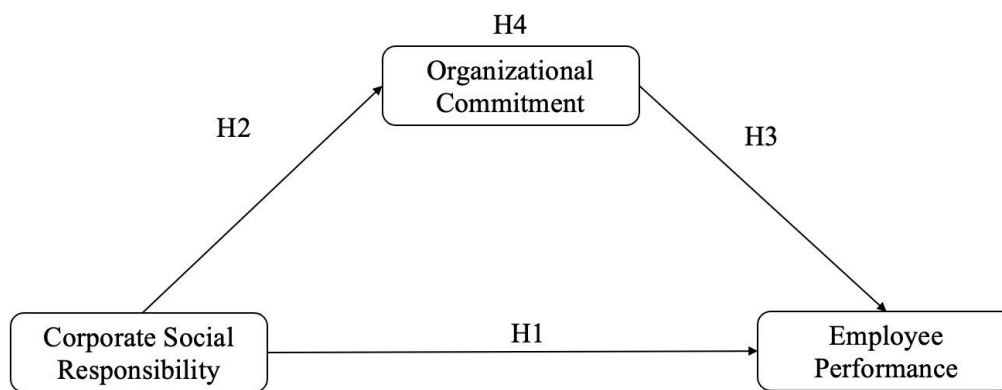


Fig. 1. Research Framework

Based on the above content, the following assumptions are proposed:

- H1: Employee performance is positively influenced by Corporate Social Responsibility.
- H2: Organizational commitment is enhanced by the implementation of Corporate Social Responsibility.
- H3: There is a positive relationship between organizational commitment and employee performance.
- H4: The effect of Corporate Social Responsibility on employee performance is mediated by organizational commitment.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

The present investigation adopted a rigorous quantitative research methodology to scrutinize the hypothesized relationships among the identified constructs. Specifically, a cross-sectional survey technique was strategically employed to gather data, aiming to capture the perceptions and experiences of employees working within the higher education institutions of Henan province. This data collection method facilitated an in-depth understanding of the variables at a singular point in time, allowing for a snapshot view of the dynamics at play. Such an approach was selected based on its suitability and effectiveness in testing the established hypotheses, which were meticulously derived from an extensive theoretical framework (Creswell, 2009). This methodological choice underscores the study's commitment to empirical precision and the objective examination of the proposed theoretical relationships.

3.2 POPULATION AND SAMPLING

In conducting this study, the research population was meticulously chosen from the faculty and administrative staff across a carefully selected array of universities in Henan. These institutions were specifically recognized for their proactive involvement in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives, underscoring their commitment to ethical and sustainable practices within the educational sector. To ensure a comprehensive representation that encapsulates the diverse roles and departments within these universities, a stratified random sampling technique was rigorously applied. This methodological approach was instrumental in capturing a wide array of perspectives and experiences related to CSR activities, thus enriching the study's findings. Further, to ascertain the statistical robustness and reliability of the ensuing multiple regression analysis, the sample size was carefully calculated based on the recommendations from a G*Power analysis. **To this end, a total of 350 faculty and administrative staff members were surveyed, with 328 valid questionnaires being retrieved. The distribution of questionnaires was carried out via email, which facilitated the efficient collection of data while also allowing for the inclusion of a wide demographic, further broadening the study's scope and depth of analysis.**

3.3 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

In this study, the methodological approach included the employment of rigorously validated scales aimed at measuring the key constructs of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Organizational Commitment (OC), and Employee Performance (EP). The CSR dimension was meticulously assessed using a scale adapted from the seminal work of Turker (2009), which comprehensively evaluates CSR across its multifaceted dimensions, including economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities. This scale allows for a nuanced understanding of how organizations navigate their societal roles beyond mere profit generation.

For the measurement of Organizational Commitment, the study leveraged the widely recognized scale developed by Allen and Meyer (1990), renowned for its ability to capture the depth and variety of commitment through affective, continuance, and normative components. This scale is instrumental in discerning the different facets of commitment that employees exhibit towards their organizations, ranging from emotional attachment to perceived costs associated with leaving and a sense of obligation to remain.

Employee Performance was evaluated through a set of items that reflect both task performance and contextual performance, drawing on the foundational work by Borman and Motowidlo (1993). This dual perspective on performance encompasses not only the direct contributions of employees to their job tasks but also their engagement in behaviors that contribute to the organizational environment, offering a holistic view of employee output and engagement within the workplace.

3.4 DATA ANALYSIS

In this investigation, the gathered data underwent a rigorous analytical process utilizing Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), a methodological framework that is exceptionally apt for the current study due to its capacity to intricately dissect the complex interplays existing between observed and latent variables, thereby providing a robust analytical lens (Hair et al., 2010). Furthermore, the exploration of indirect effects, a critical aspect of mediation analysis, was conducted employing the bootstrapping method, an advanced statistical technique renowned for its efficacy in mediation tests. This methodological approach is instrumental in providing empirical evidence of mediation, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of how intermediate variables may mediate the relationships between independent and dependent variables. The employment of such sophisticated analytical techniques underscores the study's commitment to methodological rigor, facilitating a comprehensive examination of the proposed theoretical framework.

4. RESULTS

4.1 DEMOGRAPHICS CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

Table 1 elucidates the demographic characteristics of the study population, segmented by variables such as sex, age, education level, position, work experience, and marital status. The gender distribution shows a near equilibrium with males at 48.5% and females at 51.5%. Age groups span from 18 to 25 years (7.3%) up to 56 years and above (18.0%), indicating a diverse age range. Educational attainment varies widely, with the majority holding a doctorate (44.8%), followed by master's (29.9%) and bachelor's degrees (19.8%). Employment roles are primarily in teaching and research (56.7%), with lesser representation in administrative, technical support, and service/logistics positions. Work experience ranges from 1 to over 21 years, with a notable concentration in the 6–10-year bracket (29.6%). Marital status varies, with significant proportions being single (31.1%), married with children (32.6%), and married without children (19.2%).

Table 1. Demographics Characteristics

Variable	Category	Frequency	%
Sex	Male	159	48.5
	Female	169	51.5
Age	18-25	24	7.3
	26-35	98	29.9
	36-45	76	23.2
	46-55	71	21.6
	56 and above	59	18.0
Education Level	High school or below	2	0.6
	Associate degree	16	4.9
	Bachelor's degree	65	19.8
	Master's degree	98	29.9
	Doctorate	147	44.8
Position	Administrative staff	86	26.2
	Teaching and research staff	186	56.7
	Technical support staff	32	9.8
Work Experience	Service and logistics staff	24	7.3
	1-5 years	65	19.8
	6-10 years	97	29.6

e	11-15 years	83	25.3
	16-20 years	62	18.9
	21 years and above	21	6.4
	Single	102	31.1
Marital Status	Married, without children	63	19.2
	Married, with children	107	32.6
	Divorced	26	7.9
	Others	30	9.2

4.2 MEASUREMENT MODEL RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Table 2 & 3 presents an analysis of item loading and construct reliability in the context of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Organizational Commitment (OC), and Employee Performance (EP). Factor Loadings (FL) for CSR items range from 0.825 to 0.896, indicating a strong association with the construct. Cronbach's Alpha (CA) and Composite Reliability (CR) values for CSR (0.942 and 0.952, respectively), OC (0.966 and 0.973), and EP (0.979 and 0.983) demonstrate excellent internal consistency. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values further affirm construct validity, with CSR at 0.741, OC at 0.858, and EP leading with 0.921, suggesting significant explained variance (Hair, 2009).

Table 4 assesses discriminant validity through the Fornell-Larcker criterion, illustrating inter-construct relationships. The diagonal elements represent the square root of the AVE for CSR, EP, and OC, respectively, showcasing high levels of self-associated variance (CSR=0.861, EP=0.96, OC=0.926). Off-diagonal elements indicate lower correlations between different constructs (e.g., CSR-EP=0.798, CSR-OC=0.825, EP-OC=0.799), confirming that each construct is distinctly captured, supporting discriminant validity within the model. (Henseler et al., 2015).

Table 2. Individual Indicator Reliability (Factor Loadings)

ITEMS	CSR	OC	EP
CSR1	0.881		
CSR2	0.847		
CSR3	0.852		
CSR4	0.896		
CSR5	0.849		
CSR6	0.875		
CSR7	0.825		
OC1		0.805	
OC2		0.964	
OC3		0.953	
OC4		0.951	
OC5		0.946	
OC6		0.928	
EP1			0.973
EP2			0.952
EP3			0.961
EP4			0.959
EP5			0.954

*Notes: CSR – Corporate Social Responsibility, OC – Organizational Commitment, EP – Employee Performance.

Table 3. Internal Consistency, Reliability, and Convergent Validity.

ITEMS	CA	CR	AVE
CSR	0.942	0.952	0.741

OC	0.966	0.973	0.858
EP	0.979	0.983	0.921

*Notes: CSR – Corporate Social Responsibility, OC – Organizational Commitment, EP – Employee Performance; CA – Cronbach's Alpha, CR – Composite Reliability, AVE – Average Variance Extracted.

Table 4. Discriminant Validity (Fornell-Larcker)

	CSR	EP	OC
CSR	0.861		
EP	0.798	0.96	
OC	0.825	0.799	0.926

4.3 HYPOTHESIS TEST

Table 5 presents the results of a hypothesis test exploring the impact of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) on Employee Performance (EP) and Organizational Commitment (OC), as well as the effect of OC on EP. The path coefficients (beta), standard deviations (STDEV), t-values, p-values, and decision outcomes are systematically provided for each hypothesized path.

The analysis indicates a significant positive relationship between CSR and EP with a path coefficient of 0.433 and a remarkably high t-value of 6.327, leading to the acceptance of this hypothesis at a p-value of 0.000, suggesting the relationship is statistically significant at the 0.001 level. Similarly, the relationship between CSR and OC is also positively significant, with a beta of 0.825, a t-value of 36.865, and a p-value of 0.000, indicating very strong evidence to accept this hypothesis. Finally, the path from OC to EP shows a beta of 0.442, a t-value of 6.831, and a p-value of 0.000, again confirming the hypothesis with high statistical significance.

These results collectively underline the critical role of CSR in enhancing employee performance directly and through fostering organizational commitment. The exceptionally high t-value for the CSR to OC path highlights the profound impact of CSR on organizational commitment, which, in turn, significantly contributes to employee performance. This suggests that CSR initiatives are not only vital for fulfilling social and ethical responsibilities but also serve as a strategic tool in enhancing organizational effectiveness through improved commitment and performance among employees. The acceptance of all hypotheses at a significance level of 0.001 underscores the robustness of the relationships explored in this study.

Table 5. Hypothesis Test

Paths	beta	STDEV	t-values	p-values	Decision
CSR → EP	0.433	0.068	6.327	.000***	Accepted
CSR → OC	0.825	0.022	36.865	.000***	Accepted
OC → EP	0.442	0.065	6.831	.000***	Accepted

*Notes: * significant at 0.05, *** significant at 0.001; CSR – Corporate Social Responsibility, OC – Organizational Commitment, EP – Employee Performance.

4.4 MEDIATION ANALYSIS

Table 6 presents findings from a mediation analysis exploring the influence of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) on Employee Performance (EP) through Organizational Commitment (OC) as a mediator. In Table 6, the path from CSR through OC to EP is quantified with a beta coefficient of 0.365, demonstrating a moderate positive effect. This effect is statistically significant, with a t-value of 6.293 and a p-value of 0.000, indicating strong empirical support for the mediation path. The standard deviation (STDEV) of the beta coefficient, reported as 0.058, reflects the variability around the estimated effect size, further affirming the reliability of the result.

The direct effect of CSR on EP, not mediated by OC, is 0.433, while the indirect effect, that which is mediated by OC, is 0.365. The total effect, combining both direct and indirect effects, is 0.798, suggesting a substantial overall impact of CSR on EP when considering both paths. The Variance Accounted For (VAF) value of 0.4573 indicates that approximately

45.73% of the total effect of CSR on EP is accounted for by the mediation through OC, reinforcing the conclusion of partial mediation.

The significant direct and indirect effects imply that while CSR directly influences EP, a significant portion of its impact is also channeled through how it affects organizational commitment. The high statistical significance and moderate to high effect sizes lend credence to the argument that fostering a culture of social responsibility can enhance employee performance, not just directly but also by nurturing a committed workforce.

Table 6. Mediation Analysis Table

Paths	beta	STDEV	t-values	p-values
CSR → OC → EP	0.365	0.058	6.293	.000***

*Notes: * significant at 0.05, *** significant at 0.001; CSR – Corporate Social Responsibility, OC – Organizational Commitment, EP – Employee Performance.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study rigorously examines the interplay between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Organizational Commitment (OC), and Employee Performance (EP) in Henan's university sector. Confirming CSR's significant, positive impact on EP—both directly and via OC's mediating role—this investigation supports Aguinis and Glavas (2019)'s assertion on CSR's pivotal role in fostering positive employee outcomes through enhanced organizational commitment.

Utilizing mediation analysis, the research quantitatively delineates CSR's direct and indirect effects on EP, identifying OC as a crucial intermediary. A Variance Accounted For (VAF) ratio of 0.4573 indicates partial mediation, suggesting CSR improves EP through both direct impact and by strengthening OC, highlighting CSR's comprehensive role in boosting employee performance, a notion aligned with Hair et al. (2019)'s emphasis on understanding both direct and mediated effects in organizational studies.

The study's findings underscore CSR's criticality in the educational sector for not only enhancing institutions' external images but also for augmenting internal dynamics like employee commitment and performance. This corroborates Chen and Vanclay (2021), and Moggi (2023)'s view on the education sector's pivotal role in advocating sustainable, ethical practices congruent with employee values and institutional missions.

Further, the research shows CSR initiatives align with employees' values and institutional missions, boosting psychological attachment and performance—a finding resonant with Meyer and Allen (1991), and Gond et al. (2017)'s work on the psychological bases of organizational commitment and its effect on performance outcomes.

The role of CSR in enhancing EP can be examined through the lens of Social Identity Theory (SIT). SIT suggests that individuals derive part of their self-concept from their membership in social groups, including their workplace (Tajfel and Turner, 2004). By actively engaging in CSR, universities in Henan may bolster employees' organizational identification, leading to enhanced performance as employees strive to contribute positively to an institution they feel closely aligned with. This theoretical interpretation supports the empirical evidence presented, further solidifying the comprehensive impact of CSR on enhancing employee outcomes through both OC and direct pathways.

Additionally, the impact of CSR on OC and EP may vary depending on individual differences and contextual factors. For instance, the generational cohort of employees may moderate the strength of CSR's influence on OC and EP, as different generations may prioritize social and ethical values differently (Tan & Chin, 2023). Moreover, the specific nature of CSR activities could differentially affect employee outcomes, suggesting a nuanced landscape where not all CSR efforts are equally impactful (Tafolli & Grabner-Kräuter, 2020).

For higher education management, these insights reveal CSR's critical role as a core strategic management element, vital for fostering a committed workforce and superior performance. This study notably enriches the literature by evidencing OC's mediating role in the CSR-EP link within Henan's academic settings, underscoring CSR and OC's strategic importance in enhancing employee performance, providing invaluable insights for educational policymakers, educators, and management aiming to utilize CSR for organizational and educational excellence.

Ethical Approval:

As per international standards or university standards written ethical approval has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

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