Identifying the pattern of relationships between employer branding indicators using multi-criteria decision-making technique: Corporate social responsibility in the fashion industry

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Abstract

This research aims to identify the relationship patterns among employer branding indices in the fashion industry, focusing on corporate social responsibility in small and medium-sized fashion companies. The research is applied in objective, mixed (qualitative-quantitative) in data type, cross-sectional in time frame, and descriptive-survey in methodology. The statistical population includes textile engineering experts, executive managers, and university professors. Ten experts were purposefully interviewed using a theoretical and purposive sampling method, selecting individuals prominent in this field. The quantitative sample also includes 10 randomly selected experts. Data collection tools were semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. Data analysis in the qualitative section followed the six-stage theme analysis using MAXQDA, while the Delphi technique in Excel validated the indicators in the quantitative section. Findings reveal five main dimensions: high-quality and sustainable products, effective brand communications, enhanced social responsibility, positive customer experiences, and innovation. From 132 initial codes extracted from interviews, 25 secondary codes emerged. The Delphi technique confirmed these indicators. The results highlight that innovation in fashion design and production can reduce environmental impact by utilizing recycled and natural materials, new technologies, and sustainable products, ensuring high quality and resource efficiency.

Keywords: branding, fashion industry, social responsibility, small and medium companies

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1. Introduction

Researchers examined corporate social responsibility as an important feature of employer branding for retaining talented employees and confirmed that social responsibility significantly impacts retention within an organization. Furthermore, new pathways of employer branding ideas have emerged, namely a pathway that conceptualizes it as a comprehensive and process-oriented discipline, including branding theories, human resource management, and corporate social responsibility, or a pathway that integrates corporate social responsibility and human rights into a cohesive framework (García et al., 2023). Creating corporate social responsibility "human rights" to demonstrate a multidimensional feature as a tool for enhancing organizational performance based on unique hiring and retention. Even potential future employees can be influenced by the company's focus on social responsibility, social welfare, and environmental responsibility (Diana et al., 2023). The employer brand is also one of the strategies of human capital management for differentiation in the present era. The main function of the employer brand is to attract potential external workforce and retain internal talents. Initially, branding was used to differentiate tangible products, but over time it has been applied to differentiate people, places, and organizations (Mirjalili et al., 2023). Employer branding is defined as a long-term strategy for managing the awareness and perception of current and potential employees and stakeholders, which includes both direct and indirect experiences with the organization. It is necessary for organizations to invest in their employer branding just as they do for their products, because employees are the internal customers of the organization. Nowadays, an effective employer brand is essential for competitive advantage. Employer branding is the process of identifying and creating the organization's brand message, using traditional marketing principles to achieve the position of a top employer for selection (Bahl et al., 2023).

The present study has identified a significant gap in the existing literature regarding small and medium-sized enterprises in the fashion industry and their understanding of corporate social responsibility (CSR), sustainability, and business ethics. There is a lack of information on how the corporate social responsibility actions of small and medium-sized enterprises impact employer branding, especially in the context of sustainable fashion companies (Christina et al., 2023). The development of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Iran is regarded as a key strategy for economic growth and unemployment reduction. However, many Iranian SMEs still face multiple challenges in aligning with international standards. The lack of familiarity with global concepts and the failure to adopt modern management practices especially in areas such as quality, marketing, and innovation are some of the main barriers preventing SMEs from accessing global markets. According to Mousavi and Rahimi (2023), Iranian SMEs encounter cultural and organizational crises that hinder their growth and international expansion. In comparison to international standards, Iranian SMEs typically utilize fewer logistics principles and quality benchmarks. For instance, while ISO 9001 emphasizes a comprehensive quality management system, many Iranian SMEs do not pay significant attention to these standards in practice. This oversight can lead to decreased quality of products and services. Studies by Fazeli et al. (2023) indicate that approximately 40% of Iranian SMEs do not employ modern quality management techniques, which negatively impacts their export potential. Conversely, organizational culture within Iranian SMEs often leans towards traditional and individual-centric management styles. In many developed countries, team-oriented and participatory cultures significantly enhance innovation and efficiency. Research by Zarei and Keshavarz (2023) highlights that

implementing collaborative approaches and strengthening interpersonal communications in organizations leads to more opportunities for learning and innovation. This observation indicates that Iranian SMEs must shift towards changing cultural patterns and embrace participatory models to align closer with international practices and compete in global markets. Given these challenges and opportunities, enhancing educational and research capacities within Iranian SMEs particularly concerning intercultural communication and alignment with international standards is crucial. Developing training initiatives and consultancy programs aimed at raising awareness of international standards and their implementation can serve as an effective step toward improving operational performance and increasing competitiveness of these enterprises in the global marketplace. This study highlights the need to understand how sustainability, corporate social responsibility, and business ethics are interpreted, especially in relation to their employees, and how these interpretations shape employer branding strategies. This research, focusing on the fashion industry and reputation as elements that stakeholders perceive as essential for employer branding, aims to bridge the knowledge gap regarding the role of corporate social responsibility in enhancing employee commitment to small and medium-sized sustainable fashion companies. This study addresses the lack of knowledge regarding the understanding of corporate social responsibility, sustainability, and business ethics by small and medium sized enterprises in the fashion industry. The focus is on understanding how sustainability, corporate social responsibility, and business ethics are interpreted, especially in relation to their employees, and how these elements contribute to employer branding, and how these elements help in employer branding. In other words, the aim of this research is to address the lack of understanding of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the fashion industry regarding corporate social responsibility (CSR), sustainability, and business ethics. The study aims to examine the relationship between corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives and employer branding, particularly focusing on sustainable small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the fashion industry. It also investigates how CSR elements related to employees manifest in these SMEs and how they play a role in shaping the employer branding of sustainable fashion companies.

By conducting qualitative research through interviews with owners and managers of small and medium-sized fashion companies, the aim of this study is to clarify the vital aspects of corporate social responsibility and its effectiveness in employer branding in the fashion industry. Therefore, the following question is raised in this research:

Employer branding model in the fashion industry: How is corporate social responsibility implemented by small and medium-sized fashion companies?

2. Theoretical foundations

2.1. Fashion apparel industry

The fashion apparel industry is undergoing significant transformations driven by ethical considerations, resource efficiency, visual marketing, and sustainable fashion practices. Ethical fashion and apparel retailers are redefining the industry by combining principles of distributive justice and stakeholder orientation. The alignment between resources and the targeting of the new product positively impacts the performance of the new product, as technology fit, marketing fit, and production fit play important roles. Visual marketing is essential for communicating fashion trends, enhancing brand equity, and influencing consumer decisions in a saturated market (Mariana et al., 2023).

The fashion industry plays an important role in the economy, especially in the European Union, where it provides job opportunities for 1.5 million people. Almost half of these job opportunities come from the fashion industry, which accounts for an annual turnover of about 160 billion euros. It is worth mentioning that the majority (90%) of this turnover is generated by small businesses in the manufacturing industry. The global fashion industry operates under various regulations, laws, and environmental conditions at the state level. Despite its economic contribution, the fashion industry is also recognized as the second-largest industrial polluter in the world. This highlights the need for sustainable practices and corporate social responsibility in the industry (Christina et al., 2023).

2.2. Branding

Branding plays an important role in modern marketing strategies and serves as a tool for product differentiation, attracting consumers, and creating value. This includes managing a brand to increase its growth and recognition, using various strategies to capture consumer attention and build trust and loyalty. The concept of branding extends beyond products to areas where physical characteristics can be observed (Marcia et al., 2022).

2.3. Ethical branding in line with corporate social responsibility

In the fashion industry, ethical branding is crucial for influencing consumer choices. Integrating ethical values into brand identity resonates strongly with consumers who prioritize these considerations. The rise of green consumerism, where consumers seek sustainable and ethically produced products, further emphasizes the importance of brands demonstrating commitment to these practices (Fan et al., 2023). Aligning brand ideals with ethical principles like sustainability and social responsibility fosters consumer loyalty and provides a competitive edge by attracting and retaining consumers who value ethical consumption. (Sutono et al., 2023).

2.4. Corporate social responsibility in the fashion industry

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) entails a company's commitment to its social and environmental impacts, extending beyond profit to consider societal influence (Permana et al., 2024). Historically viewed as charity and often manifesting as one-time donations, CSR integration into core business strategies was limited until the 1990s. A lack of stakeholder engagement and strategic planning historically hindered CSR effectiveness. However, companies increasingly recognize CSR's potential to address social issues and foster sustainable solutions, aligning with government efforts to create economic opportunities for disadvantaged communities (Patel, 2020). In fashion, CSR programs encompass ethical labor, community engagement, charitable involvement, and sustainable resources to tackle ethical, social, and environmental challenges within the supply chain. Fashion businesses are prioritizing sustainability to meet consumer demand and mitigate the industry's environmental footprint, addressing issues like carbon emissions, textile waste, and resource depletion (Niinimäki et al., 2022 and Achalbo et al., 2013).

Domestic and foreign research conducted in this field is briefly mentioned: Gelerd and colleagues (2024) in a study titled Identification and Ranking of Employer Branding Strategies: A Mixed Approach, the results of the qualitative section led to the identification of two general strategies (internal and external strategies) influencing employer branding in the

organization. The quantitative findings also indicated that among the internal strategies of the employer brand, work-life balance and among the external strategies of the employer brand, social networking in the virtual space had the highest priority. Shakeri and colleagues (2024) in their study titled Designing an Employer Branding Model at the Statistical Center of Iran with a Mixed Approach, The research findings, consisting of 6 dimensions, 17 components, and 51 items, led to the design of the employer branding model at the Statistical Center of Iran, and ultimately, seventeen components play a role in explaining the employer branding model at the Statistical Center of Iran. Sehat and colleagues (2023) in the study, Designing a multi-level employer branding model in the commercial banking system, the results showed that 14 themes such as interventions and compulsion by higher institutions, international relations, laws and regulations, technological developments, industry competition, socio-cultural developments, political developments, governance policies, etc. At a macro level, they influence employer branding in the commercial banking system. At the intermediate level, 36 themes such as organizational climate, geographical location, dynamic and flexible organizational structure, organizational transparency, social responsibility, quality of the reward system, quality of the compensation system, organizational discipline, job rotation and enrichment, and he was effective in the employer branding of the bank. Valipour and colleagues (2020) In a study titled, Examining the impact of brand title, brand awareness, brand attitude, and brand reputation on brand performance in the apparel industry (Case study of the LC Waikiki brand), The results of the hypotheses showed that brand signature (including two aspects: brand name and brand logo) has a positive and significant impact on brand attitude and brand awareness among customers. Additionally, brand awareness has a positive and significant impact on brand attitude, and these two variables also influence brand reputation. Ultimately, brand reputation also has a positive and significant effect on brand performance. Takalak and colleagues (2024) in a study titled, Attitude towards sustainable development and employer branding: A comparison of generations X, Y, and Z in two countries, all generational groups consider sustainability an important factor in their evaluation of employer brands. Andrew and colleagues (2024), the impact of corporate social responsibility and sustainable development practices on employer branding – a case study of an international company, The company's social responsibility activities were the most effective in addressing environmental issues. The corporate social responsibility practices of foreign companies were recognized among white-collar (office) employees, while blue-collar (manual) workers appreciated the company's internal social responsibility actions, especially the sponsorship plans. The effectiveness of corporate social responsibility practices of domestic and foreign companies has rarely been compared in the literature, and the present study was conducted to fill this knowledge gap. Azhadri and colleagues (2023), examining the relationship between company reputation, employer branding and corporate social responsibility, corporate social responsibility has a positive and meaningful impact on employer branding and the company's reputation. Employer branding also has a positive impact on the company's reputation and helps create a positive reputation for organizations. Based on the research findings, organizations should place great importance on corporate social responsibility and create a suitable brand to achieve a good reputation.

3. Research method

Considering that the aim of this research is employer branding in the fashion industry: corporate social responsibility through medium and small fashion companies; therefore, the research method was applied in terms of purpose, mixed (qualitative-quantitative) in terms

of data type, cross-sectional in terms of data collection time, and descriptive-survey in terms of data collection method and nature and research method. As mentioned, this research examines the research questions in two phases: qualitative and quantitative. After extracting the components based on interviews with experts, the Delphi test is used to confirm the components and validity. Therefore, the Delphi test screens the components based on the experts' scores. The first part of the research involves using a qualitative method aimed at identifying, classifying, and extracting concepts based on the perspectives of relevant experts and specialists. The qualitative method used in this section will be based on thematic analysis. In the second part of the research, which is a quantitative method, the relationship between the dimensions of the research and the study title is examined using the opinions of the research statistical community, and the components and dimensions of the research are also reviewed and tested. In this method, thematic analysis is used to analyze interviews with 8 relevant experts. In the quantitative section of the research, the data obtained through a researcher-made questionnaire were analyzed using the Delphi technique. Using this method, the dimensions and components of the research have been validated based on expert opinions. Therefore, the method of data collection for this research is both library-based and field-based. The statistical population of this research includes textile engineering experts, executive managers, and university professors, from whom 10 experts were purposefully interviewed. The participants in this research are composed of specialists. The sampling method of this research is theoretical and purposive. In fact, individuals are selected as examples who are experts and prominent in this field. The statistical population includes a quantitative section consisting of textile engineering experts, executives, and university professors, from which a sample of 10 people has been randomly selected. The tool for collecting the qualitative section is through semi-structured interviews. In the quantitative section, a researcher-made questionnaire was used as the data collection tool. The data collection tool at this stage is the Delphi questionnaire, which has been provided to experts in two rounds and they have rated it on a 5-point scale. In order to reach a final agreement, the Kendall formula has been used by the experts.

Table 1. Delphi 5-point scale

Score				
Very Low	Low	Medium	High	Very High
1	2	3	4	5

To verify the accuracy of the findings in the qualitative research, the Crossal method was used to examine the reliability and validity of the data.

4. Research findings

4.1. Demographic findings

In Table 2, the findings related to the demographic characteristics of the study participants, including the average age, average work experiences, and education in the field of the research topic, are presented.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of the experts surveyed

Group	Number	Average age	Average work experience	Education	
				Master's degree	PhD
Textile engineering experts	4	39.33	12.33	75%	25%
Executives of textile companies	3	42.22	14.66	100%	-
Professors and academic experts	3	41.25	15.33	-	100%

In the examination of the average age of the experts surveyed, it was determined that the executives of textile companies, with an average age of 42.22 years, belong to the oldest age group, while textile engineering experts, with an average age of 39.33 years, belong to the youngest age group. In the review of average work experience, it was determined that university professors and experts, with 15.33 years of activity, have the highest level of experience, while textile engineering experts, with 12.33 years of work experience, have less experience compared to university professors and experts. Among the participants in the present study, 4 individuals held a doctoral degree and 6 individuals held a master's degree.

4.2. An example of an interview conducted with experts

In Table 3. a part of the interview with the interviewees is presented.

Table 3. Excerpts from the texts of Interviewee No. 1

Interview text number 1
In my view, high-quality and sustainable products usually align with important social values. For example, the use of recycled materials, reduction of natural resource consumption, protection of workers' rights, and the creation of equal and fair working conditions enhance the distinction of these products. This connection with social values leads to the creation of a strong recognition in the community and market, introducing the brand as a responsible and accountable company. Additionally, high-quality and sustainable products usually pay a lot of attention to customer experience. This includes aspects such as precise design, ease of use, efficiency, and adaptability to customer needs. By providing a positive and satisfying customer experience, the brand shows customers that it pays attention to social and environmental issues and offers products that help them act better and more responsibly in their daily lives. Effective communication also helps the company convey its social responsibility message clearly and understandably to its audience. These messages may include the company's commitments to the environment, workers' rights, sustainable production, and the improvement of community conditions. By using various media such as advertisements, events, social media, and public relations, the brand can widely disseminate its social responsibility messages and gain the trust of the audience.

In Table 4. the main dimensions of the research, derived from secondary codes obtained from primary and open codes extracted from the conducted interviews, are reported.

Table 4. Main dimensions of the research derived from secondary codes obtained from initial and open codes

Row	Main dimensions of the research	Secondary codes
1	Providing high-quality and sustainable products	Adaptation to social values
2		Organizing customer experience
3		Creating a competitive difference
4		Increasing customer trust
5		Development of social and environmental impact
6	Development of effective brand communication	Conveying the message of social responsibility
7		Engagement with target audiences
8		Creating understanding and empathy with the brand's audience
9		Long-term branding thinking
10		Increasing brand communication credibility
11	Increasing brand social responsibility	Enhancing brand reputation and recognition
12		Deep connection with customers
13		Attracting and retaining talents
14		Increasing brand competitiveness
15		Development of credibility and customer satisfaction
16	Creating a positive customer experience	Improving brand social impact
17		Social thinking as a differentiating factor
18		Providing products and services responsibly
19		Community participation
20		Transparency and information dissemination
21	Development of innovation and creativity in the brand	Design and production of sustainable products
22		Creating innovative solutions to support workers
23		Launching innovative social projects
24		Use of sustainable materials and processes
25		Designing unique products

4.3. Final model

The final model of the research is shown in Figure 1. In this research, five main dimensions have been identified, including the provision of high-quality and sustainable products, the development of effective brand communications, the enhancement of brand social responsibility, the creation of positive customer experiences, and the development of

innovation and creativity in the brand. Additionally, 132 initial codes were extracted from 10 interviews, from which 25 secondary codes were derived
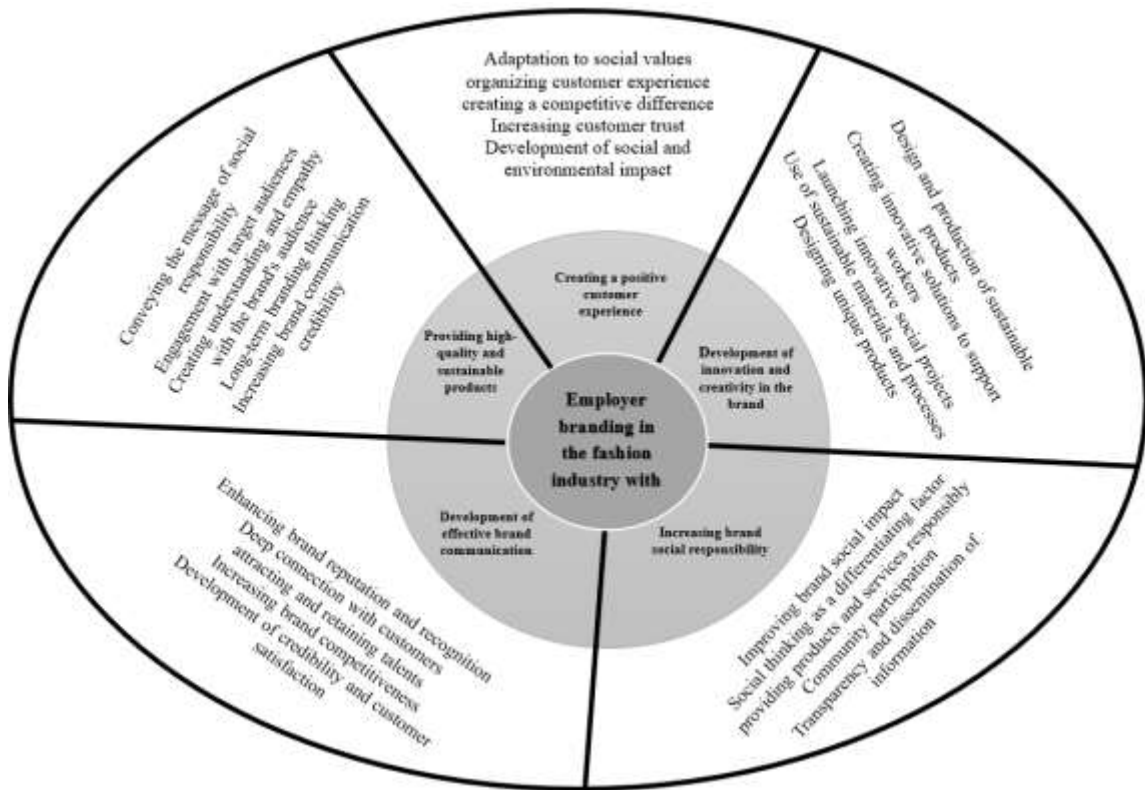

Figure 1. Final Research Model

4.4. Delphi technique (Delphi)

According to this technique, each group member was first given a questionnaire including the desired sub-criteria. Then, the indicators were individually examined by experts in the field, who were selected from 10 specialists familiar with all matters, according to the Delphi method. For the initial screening of the identified indicators, scores between 1 and 5 were assigned, and indicators with scores below 4 were eliminated. The Delphi technique continued in 2 steps. The final results obtained from the Delphi technique can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5. Final results of the Delphi technique research components

Main dimensions of the research	Secondary codes	Expert1	Expert 2	Expert 3	Expert 4	Expert 5	Expert 6	Expert 7	Expert 8	Expert 9	Expert 10	Average	Status
Providing high-quality and sustainable products	Adaptation to social values	5	4	4	4	5	5	5	3	4	3	4,2	Confirmed
	Organizing customer experience	5	4	3	5	5	5	4	4	3	4	4,2	Confirmed
	Creating a competitive difference	4	5	5	3	4	5	5	4	5	5	4,5	Confirmed
	Increasing customer trust	4	5	5	5	5	3	4	4	4	4	4,3	Confirmed
	Development of social and environmental impact	4	4	4	5	4	4	3	5	4	4	4,1	Confirmed
Development of effective brand communication	Conveying the message of social responsibility	5	4	5	5	4	5	4	4	4	4	4,4	Confirmed
	Engagement with target audiences	3	4	4	3	5	5	4	4	4	4	4	Confirmed
	Creating understanding and empathy with the brand's audience	4	4	5	4	5	4	5	4	4	4	4,3	Confirmed
	Long-term branding thinking	4	4	3	4	4	5	5	5	3	4	4,1	Confirmed
	Increasing brand communication credibility	4	4	5	5	4	4	5	5	5	4	4,5	Confirmed
Increasing brand social responsibility	Enhancing brand reputation and recognition	4	3	5	4	4	5	5	5	3	5	4,3	Confirmed
	Deep connection with customers	4	5	4	5	4	4	3	5	5	4	4,3	Confirmed
	Attracting and retaining talents	5	4	3	4	5	5	5	5	3	4	4,3	Confirmed
	Increasing brand competitiveness	5	4	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	3	4,6	Confirmed
	Development of credibility and customer satisfaction	5	4	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	4	4,7	Confirmed
Creating a positive customer experience	Improving brand social impact	5	4	5	5	4	4	5	4	4	5	4,5	Confirmed
	Social thinking as a differentiating factor	5	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	5	5	4,4	Confirmed
	Providing products and services responsibly	5	5	5	4	5	4	5	5	4	4	4,6	Confirmed

Main dimensions of the research	Secondary codes	Expert 1	Expert 2	Expert 3	Expert 4	Expert 5	Expert 6	Expert 7	Expert 8	Expert 9	Expert 10	Average	Status
	Community participation	5	5	3	4	4	4	3	5	3	4	4	Confirmed
	Transparency and information dissemination	4	5	4	5	5	5	5	4	4	5	4,6	Confirmed
	Design and production of sustainable products	5	5	4	4	5	4	5	5	5	4	4,6	Confirmed
	Creating innovative solutions to support workers	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	5	5	5	4,4	Confirmed
Development of innovation	Launching innovative social projects	4	3	5	5	3	3	5	5	4	4	4,1	Confirmed
	Use of sustainable materials and processes	4	5	4	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	4,7	Confirmed
	Designing unique products	4	4	5	4	4	5	5	3	3	5	4,2	Confirmed

According to the results in Table 5, all sub-criteria have scored above 4 and have been approved by the experts.

4.5. Kendall's test

To examine the Delphi correlation in rounds 1 and 2, we used the Kendall test. The results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Kendall's Test

Delphi	Delphi	SIG	Kandall's Coefficient
Step 1	Step 2	0.0	0.98

According to the calculation performed, SIG less than 0.05 has been obtained, indicating the significance of the relationship. Phase 1 and Phase 2 have a correlation of 98 percent.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The aim of this research was employer branding in the fashion industry: corporate social responsibility through small and medium-sized fashion companies. Based on the analysis, five main dimensions have been identified, including the provision of high-quality and sustainable products, the development of effective brand communications, the enhancement of brand social responsibility, the creation of a positive customer experience, and the promotion of innovation and creativity within the brand. Additionally, 132 initial codes were extracted from 10 interviews, from which 25 secondary codes were derived.

Considering that in this research, the development of effective brand communications and the creation of understanding and empathy with brand audiences have been identified as the main dimensions, it can be said that this research is in line with the study by Gelerd et al. (2024) titled "Identification and Ranking of Employer Branding Strategies: A Mixed Approach." The results of the qualitative section by Gelerd and colleagues (1403) led to the identification of two general strategies (internal and external strategies) influencing employer branding in the organization. Additionally, the findings of the quantitative section indicated that among the internal strategies of the employer brand, work-life balance, and among the external strategies of the employer brand, social networking in the virtual space had the highest priority. In this research, the increase in brand social responsibility and the participation of the local community as personal development and the provision of responsible products and services have been identified as the main organizational discipline. It can be stated that this research is in line with the study by Sahat and colleagues (2023) titled "Designing a Multi-Level Employer Branding Model in the Commercial Banking System." The results of Sahat and colleagues (2023) showed that 14 themes such as interventions and mandates of higher institutions, international relations, laws and regulations, technological developments, industry competition, socio-cultural changes, political developments, governance policies, and etc. At a macro level, they influence employer branding in the commercial banking system. At the intermediate level, 36 themes such as organizational climate, geographical location, dynamic and flexible organizational structure, organizational transparency, social responsibility, quality of the reward system, quality of the compensation system, organizational discipline, job rotation and enrichment, and ... It was effective in employer branding for the bank. Finally, eight themes including autonomy in work, personality and behavioral traits of candidates, individual needs and motivations, gaining social status, job-specific characteristics, candidates' beliefs and values, desire for personal development, and desire for recognition at work at the micro level influenced employer branding in the commercial banking system. The results of the present study are also in line with the findings of Andrew et al. (2024) titled "The Impact of Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainable Development Practices on Employer Branding A Case Study of an International Company". This study showed that corporate social responsibility activities were most effective in addressing environmental issues. The foreign corporate social responsibility practices were recognized among white-collar (office) employees, while blue-collar (manual) workers appreciated the company's internal social responsibility actions, especially the sponsorship programs. The effectiveness of corporate social responsibility practices of domestic and foreign companies has rarely been compared in the literature, and the present study was conducted to fill this knowledge gap. It can also be claimed that the result of this research is in line with the study by Azimi and colleagues (2024) titled "Corporate Social Responsibility and the Attractiveness of Employer Brand Personality: Approaches to Human Resource Challenges in the Hospitality Sector." The results of Azimi and colleagues (2024) indicate the impact of corporate social responsibility and the attractiveness of the employer brand personality on employee behavioral outcomes. Furthermore, the findings support the impact of corporate social responsibility in enhancing the attractiveness of the employer brand personality. Therefore, this study expands the literature on hospitality employer branding by proposing a new concept and examining its potential for addressing the hospitality labor shortage. The results of this research are in line with the study by Todayouni and colleagues (2023) titled "The Impact of Employer Branding and Company Reputation on Corporate

Social Responsibility with Customer Orientation." The results of the data analysis by Todayouni et al. (2023) indicate that the reputation and employer branding of Bank Melli have a positive and significant impact on social responsibility. There is also a significant and positive relationship between reputation and corporate social responsibility. The results indicate that the investment of the managers of the National Bank in the popularity of its employer brand can have a significant impact on enhancing its social responsibility. The findings showed that the impact of the employer brand on the social responsibility of the employees of Bank Melli is stronger than the impact of the company's reputation on social responsibility.

Based on the research findings, the following can be proposed as practical suggestions:

1) Participation in social projects: The Company should provide various opportunities for participation in projects and social activities, especially in areas that align with the company's products and values.

2) Promoting collaboration with small and medium-sized enterprises: Establishing direct relationships and active collaborations with workshops and small to medium-sized companies in the fashion industry helps you create a planned and responsible brand image.

- Promotion of high-quality and sustainable products: Emphasizing the use of high-quality, sustainable, and environmentally friendly materials in fashion production can show customers that you care about environmental and social issues.

- Organizing events and exhibitions: Holding exhibitions, events, and workshops dedicated to your company's quality products and social responsibility.

- Improving customer communication: It is very important that the brand's communication with customers is honest and effective. Show your customers that in addition to business activities, you also pay attention to social and environmental issues and support them.

- Collaboration with small and medium-sized enterprises: Establishing strategic relationships and ongoing collaborations with small and medium-sized companies in the fashion industry can help you create an image as a brand that supports entrepreneurial foundations and small and medium-sized businesses.

- Strengthening the research and development sector: Investing in research and development to enhance your products and services, as well as creating innovations in various areas of the fashion industry, can help you be recognized as a leading and innovative brand in the market.

- Organizing events and exhibitions: Participating in events, exhibitions, and fashion festivals to showcase new products, innovations, and engage in social activities can help enhance brand recognition and attract new customers and supporters.

- Enhancing customer communications: Direct communication with customers and effective activities on social media help the employer convey their messages and values of responsibility and innovation logically and effectively to their audience.

- Offering unique features and advantages such as innovative design, the use of inexpensive and recyclable materials, high durability, and better performance helps the brand stand out from its competitors.

Innovation and creativity in the design and production of fashion products can help reduce negative environmental impacts and the consumption of natural resources. By using new technologies, recycled materials, natural substances, and sustainable products, it is possible to offer products that require less energy and resources while maintaining high quality and attractiveness. Effective communication helps the company connect with its target audience and engage with them. The brand can use various methods such as a website, social media, publications, events, and public relations.

The present study, like other studies, has some limitations:

Geographical and Industrial Scope:

This research has primarily focused on the fashion industry within a specific geographical region (or Iran). Consequently, the generalizability of the findings to other industries or geographical areas, which may possess distinct cultural, economic, and marketing dynamics, necessitates caution. Cultural variations and employer branding strategies in sectors such as technology or financial services might exhibit different patterns.

Employer branding and Social Responsibility Indicators: The current research has concentrated on a defined set of indicators for employer branding and corporate social responsibility (CSR). However, the domains of employer branding and CSR are considerably broad, and there may exist additional indicators not encompassed within this study that could influence the observed relationship patterns. For instance, the impact of digital marketing and social media on employer branding could have been explored more extensively.

Suggestions for future research:

Expanding the Research Scope: To enhance the validity and generalizability of the findings, future research endeavors could broaden their geographical and industrial scope. Investigating the relationships between employer branding and social responsibility indicators across other industries (such as technology, tourism, or financial services) and in diverse geographical regions can provide a more comprehensive understanding of global patterns.

Utilizing Hybrid Techniques: It is recommended that future research employs a combination of multi-criteria decision-making (MCDM) techniques with other qualitative or quantitative data analysis methods, such as Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) or Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). These hybrid approaches can contribute to the validation of results and a more precise identification of the causal relationships between indicators.

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