

THE IMPACT OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND BRAND IMAGE ON STUDENTS' DECISION-MAKING IN VIETNAM'S HIGHER EDUCATION POST-COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

This study investigates the critical role of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and brand image in influencing students' decision-making in Vietnam's higher education sector post-COVID-19. Given the intangible nature of educational services, prospective students often rely on specific criteria, with brand image being a significant factor in their school selection process. The research aims to illustrate how CSR initiatives not only attract students but also enhance their university experience, strengthen their resumes, and improve future career prospects. Using quantitative methods, data were collected through a structured survey distributed to high school and first-year university/college students across North, Central, and Southern Vietnam, with a significant focus on the rapidly developing Southern region, particularly Ho Chi Minh City. The analysis revealed a diverse respondent profile with a predominance of first-year university students. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) results demonstrated significant positive impacts of CSR on brand image and on students' decision-making, while brand image itself significantly influenced students' choices. These findings underscore the importance of robust CSR strategies and a strong brand image in enhancing students' educational experiences and career readiness, providing valuable insights for higher education institutions in Vietnam to attract and retain students in the post-pandemic era.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, Brand Image, Decision-Making, Higher Education, Vietnam, Post-COVID-19.

INTRODUCTION

The higher education sector in Vietnam, as in many parts of the world, has undergone significant transformations due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. As institutions strive to navigate the post-pandemic landscape, understanding the factors that influence students' decision-making becomes increasingly critical.

This study focuses on the interplay between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), brand image, and students' decision-making processes in selecting higher education institutions in Vietnam, particularly in the context of the post-COVID-19 environment.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in higher education refers to the actions and policies that institutions implement to contribute to societal goals related to economic, social, and environmental sustainability. In recent years, there has been a significant shift towards integrating CSR into the strategic objectives of universities and colleges, reflecting a broader trend within various sectors (Carroll, 1991).

In the context of Vietnam's higher education sector, CSR activities have gained prominence as institutions seek to address the heightened societal expectations and challenges brought about by the pandemic (Nguyen et al., 2018). Institutions perceived to engage in meaningful CSR activities often enjoy enhanced reputations, which can be a decisive factor for prospective students.

This is particularly relevant for today's student population, which is increasingly conscious of social and environmental issues and prefers to align with institutions that share their values (Maignan & Ferrell, 2004).

Brand image in the context of higher education refers to the perceptions and associations that prospective students have regarding an institution. A positive brand image can differentiate an institution in a crowded and competitive market, influencing students' perceptions and preferences (Matli et al., 2021).

For educational institutions, developing and maintaining a strong brand image is vital not only for attracting prospective students but also for fostering a sense of loyalty and pride among current students and alumni (M'zungu et al., 2010).

In the post-COVID-19 era, the importance of a robust brand image has been amplified as students increasingly seek stability, reliability, and a sense of security in their educational choices (Bich Thi Ngoc Tran, 2022). When institutions effectively leverage CSR to enhance their brand image, they can create a compelling narrative that resonates with students' values and aspirations.

Students' decision-making in higher education is a complex process influenced by various factors, including institutional reputation, perceived quality of education, social environment, and alignment with personal values. CSR activities and a positive brand image can play pivotal roles in this process by shaping students' perceptions and attitudes towards institutions.

Previous studies have indicated that students are more likely to choose institutions that demonstrate a commitment to social responsibility and ethical conduct (Mohr & Webb, 2005). Furthermore, brand image serves as a critical mediator that enhances the impact of CSR on students' choices (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001).

Despite the recognized importance of these factors, there is a gap in the literature specifically examining how CSR and brand image influence students' decision-making in higher education in Vietnam, especially in the post-pandemic context. This paper aims to address this gap by exploring the relationships among these elements and their collective impact on students' choices.

Therefore, the specific objectives of the study are:

1. To evaluate the impact of CSR activities on students' decision-making processes.
2. To assess the influence of brand image on students' choice of higher education institutions.
3. To explore the interplay between CSR, brand image, and students' decision-making.

By investigating these issues, this study seeks to provide valuable insights for higher education administrators and marketers in Vietnam. Understanding the factors that influence students' decisions can help institutions craft strategies that align with students' values, thereby enhancing their appeal and competitive advantage in the education sector.

In conclusion, the interplay of CSR and brand image is critical in shaping students' decision-making processes in higher education in Vietnam, particularly in the post-COVID-19 environment.

This paper will delve into these relationships, offering a comprehensive analysis that underscores the importance of socially responsible practices and strong brand image in attracting and retaining students.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Literature Review

Corporate Social Responsibility in Higher Education

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in higher education refers to the ethical and socially responsible actions taken by educational institutions to benefit society. These actions can range from community engagement, environmental sustainability initiatives, and scholarship programs, to inclusive education practices (Ina Freeman, 2011).

Research indicates that CSR activities can significantly enhance the reputation and attractiveness of higher education institutions.

According to Alshuwaikhat & Abubakar (2008), universities that engage in sustainable practices not only contribute positively to society but also attract environmentally-conscious students.

In the context of Vietnam, where socio-economic challenges and educational inequalities are prevalent, CSR activities can play a crucial role in leveling the playing field. Higher education institutions that actively participate in CSR can help bridge educational gaps and promote social justice (Nguyen Hop Chau et al., 2022).

This enhanced reputation through CSR activities can influence students' decision-making, as they prefer institutions that demonstrate a commitment to societal well-being (Tuan, 2012).

Brand Image in Higher Education

Brand image in higher education encompasses the perceptions and associations that students and other stakeholders have about an institution. A strong brand image is often associated with academic excellence, innovative programs, successful alumni, and a positive learning environment (Faircloth et al., 2001).

Institutions with a strong brand image can differentiate themselves in a competitive market, making them more appealing to prospective students (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006).

Keller (1993) emphasizes that brand image is built over time through consistent delivery of quality education and positive student experiences. In the post-COVID-19 era, the importance of a strong brand image has been amplified as students seek assurance of quality and stability in their educational journey.

Institutions that effectively manage their brand image can gain a competitive edge by attracting students who prioritize brand reputation in their decision-making process (Foroudi et al., 2019).

Decision-Making in Higher Education

The decision-making process for students selecting higher education institutions involves various factors, including academic quality, location, financial considerations, and institutional reputation (Chapman, 1981).

Post-COVID-19, additional factors such as health and safety measures, online education quality, and institutional support systems have become more prominent (Marinoni et al., 2020).

Research by (Perna, 2006) highlights that students' decision-making is influenced by both personal and external factors. Personal factors include academic aspirations and socio-economic background, while external factors encompass institutional reputation and perceived value.

CSR activities and brand image are critical external factors that can sway students' choices, particularly in a context like Vietnam, where educational opportunities and quality vary significantly across institutions.

Post-COVID-19 Context

The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically altered the educational landscape, compelling institutions to adapt to new realities. Online learning has become a norm, and students now consider the quality and accessibility of digital education as key factors in their decision-making (Dhawan, 2020).

Furthermore, institutions' responses to the pandemic, including health protocols and support for students, have become critical in shaping their reputation and attractiveness (Watermeyer et al., 2021).

In Vietnam, where the pandemic's impact has been profound, students' priorities have shifted towards safety, flexibility, and institutional reliability. Institutions that have demonstrated resilience and a commitment to student welfare during the pandemic are likely to be favored by prospective students (Ngo & Phan, 2023).

Hypotheses Development

Based on the literature review, the following hypotheses are developed:

Hypothesis 1: CSR has a positive influence on students' decision-making in higher education.

Existing literature supports the notion that CSR activities enhance the reputation and attractiveness of educational institutions (Nguyen Hop Chau et al., 2022). Therefore, it is hypothesized that CSR positively impacts students' choices.

Hypothesis 2: Brand image positively impacts students' choice of higher education institutions.

A strong brand image is associated with academic excellence and positive student experiences, making institutions more appealing to prospective students (Keller, 1993; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006). Hence, it is hypothesized that brand image significantly influences students' decisions.

Hypothesis 3: The effect of CSR on decision-making is mediated by brand image.

CSR activities contribute to building a positive brand image, which in turn influences students' decision-making (Javed et al., 2021). Thus, it is hypothesized that brand image mediates the relationship between CSR and students' choices.

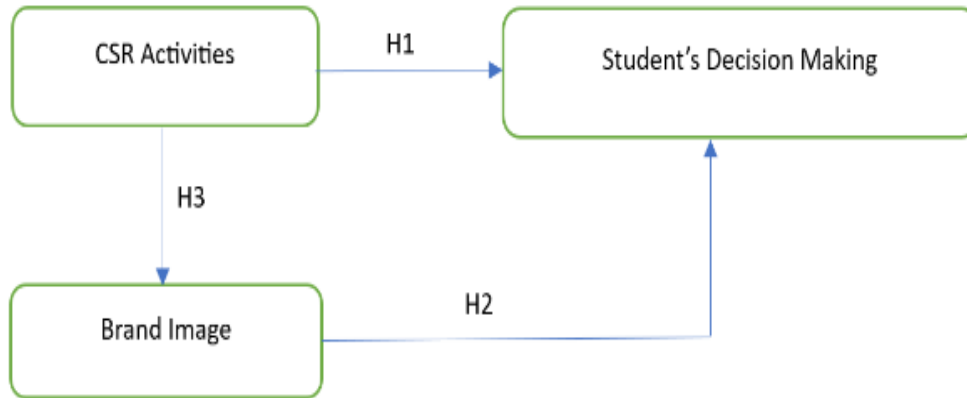


Figure 1: Research Framework

METHODOLOGY

This study employs quantitative research methods to investigate the impact of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and brand image on students' decision-making in Vietnam's higher education sector post-COVID-19 pandemic. The data collection process involved distributing a structured survey via a Google Drive link, targeting high school students and first-year college and university students in Vietnam.

Data Collection

The survey was designed to capture students' perceptions of CSR and brand image of higher education institutions, and how these factors influence their decision-making process. The questionnaire included both closed-ended and Likert 7- scale questions to quantify the attitudes and preferences of the respondents. "Strongly disagree" receives a score of 7, while "strongly agree" receives 1. To ensure comprehensive coverage, the survey was disseminated across three key regions in Vietnam: the North, Central, and Southern regions. Every variable included in the questionnaire is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of Measurement Items

Variables	Number of Question	Per variable
CSR Activities	7	Q2-Q8
Brand Image	6	Q9-Q14
Student's Decision Making	8	Q15-Q22

Given the rapid development and economic significance of the Southern region, particularly Ho Chi Minh City, a larger proportion of the survey samples were allocated to this area. This strategic focus aimed to reflect the educational dynamics and decision-making processes prevalent in this economically vibrant region, providing richer insights for the study.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

A minimal sample size was given by Hair, Black, & Babin (2010), depending on the model's complexity.

Table 2: Model Characteristics using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)

Model Characteristics (Number of latent constructs and items)	Minimum Sample Required
Five or fewer latent constructs. Each latent has more than three items	100
Seven or fewer latent constructs. Each construct has more than three items	150
Seven or fewer latent constructs. Certain construct has less than three items (under identified model)	300
Large number of latent constructs. Certain constructs have less than three items (under identified model)	500

The initial survey distribution aimed to reach a broad audience, resulting in over 600 responses. However, after a rigorous data cleaning process to ensure the validity and reliability of the responses, 480 usable samples were retained for analysis. The criteria for inclusion in the final dataset included completeness of responses and consistency checks to filter out any anomalous data entries.

The sample was stratified to ensure representation across the different educational stages and geographic regions. This stratified sampling approach helps in capturing a diverse range of perspectives, thereby enhancing the generalizability of the study's findings. The emphasis on Ho Chi Minh City in the Southern region is aligned with the research objective to understand the influence of regional development on educational choices.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using IBM SPSS and AMOS software. SPSS was used for descriptive statistics to provide an overview of the demographic characteristics of the respondents and their initial responses to CSR and brand image-related questions. Inferential statistics, including regression analysis, were employed to examine the relationships between CSR, brand image, and students' decision-making processes. This analysis helped to identify significant predictors and to understand the magnitude of their impact. AMOS (Analysis of Moment Structures) was utilized to perform structural equation modeling (SEM) to test the hypothesized relationships between variables and to assess the model fit. SEM allowed for the examination of complex relationships and provided a more nuanced understanding of how CSR and brand image influence decision-making.

RESULTS

Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive analysis of the survey data provides a comprehensive overview of the demographic characteristics of the respondents, as well as their educational status and their study plans.

Gender Distribution: The sample consists of 316 males (65.8%) and 164 females (34.2%), indicating a higher participation rate among male students.

Age Distribution: Respondents were categorized into three age groups: 140 students (29.2%) were aged 15-17 years (Group 1), 298 students (62.1%) were aged 18-21 years (Group 2), and 42 students (8.7%) were aged 22-25 years (Group 3). Most of the respondents fall within the 18-21 age range, reflecting the target demographic of high school seniors and first-year university/college students.

Regional Distribution: The survey covers three main regions of Vietnam. The North had 57 respondents (11.9%), the Central region had 12 respondents (2.5%), and the South had the highest representation with 411 respondents (85.6%). This distribution underscores the strategic focus on the Southern region, particularly Ho Chi Minh City, due to its rapid development and educational significance.

Educational Status: Among the respondents, 165 (34.4%) were high school students, 9 (1.9%) had graduated from high school, and 306 (63.7%) were first-year university/college students. This breakdown aligns with the study's aim to capture insights from students at critical decision-making stages in their educational journeys.

Study Plans: Regarding future educational and career plans, almost the respondents, 75.9%, plan to continue studying at the university level, indicating a strong inclination towards higher education. Conversely, the smallest proportion, 5.7%, expressed a plan to stop studying and enter the workforce directly.

This descriptive analysis highlights the demographic and educational profile of the survey respondents, providing a solid foundation for further analysis of how CSR and brand image influence their decision-making processes. The data reveal key trends and preferences among students in different regions and educational stages, offering valuable insights for educational institutions in Vietnam.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
GENDER		
Males	316	65.8
Females	164	34.2
Total	480	100
AGE (years old)		
15-17	140	29.2
18-21	298	62.1
22-25	42	8.7
Total	480	100
REGION		
The North	57	11.9
The Middle	12	2.5
The South	411	85.6
Total	480	100
STATUS		
Highschool Students	165	34.4

Students have graduated from high school	9	1.9
First year university/college students	306	63.7
Total	480	100
PLAN		
Stop studying to go to work	10	5.7
Choose a vocational school or college to study	13	7.5
Continue studying at the University	132	75.9
There are no plans yet	19	10.9
Total	174	100
Missing system value	315	
Total	480	

Reliability Analysis:

Reliability and validity of the survey instrument were tested using Cronbach's alpha and factor analysis, ensuring that the constructs measured were both consistent and accurately represented the concepts of interest. Reliability analysis is the study of measurement scale properties and the elements that comprise such scales. Cronbach alpha, which is based on the average correlation of the test's items, is utilized when administering exams using standard items. If the items are not standard, it is based on the average covariance among the components.

According to Coakes (2007), the range of Cronbach's alpha, which is a correlation coefficient, is 0 to 1. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to assess each component's reliability. The internal consistency measure of the evaluated items for each construct must be greater than or equal to 0.6. To verify the instrument's dependability for CSR, Brand Image (BI), and Student Decision Making (SDM), a reliability test is conducted. Table 4 shows that Cronbach's Alpha is more than 0.7 for every structure. Cronbach's Alpha values larger than 0.6 suggest that the instruments are adequately dependable for study, according to Sekaran & Bougie (2016) and Awang (2012).

Table 4: The Reliability Assessment for All Constructs

Variables	Skewness	Kurtosis	Cronbach's Alpha (n =480)
CSR	1.404	1.435	0.97
Brand Image (BI)	1.137	1.017	0.94
Student's Decision Making (SDM)	1.250	0.899	0.98

Normality Test:

Prior to using SEM, the normalcy assumption was looked at. The skewness and kurtosis data in Table 4 indicate that the skewness values vary from 1.137 to 1.404. As indicated by the kurtosis values, the value falls between 0.899 and 1.435. These results show that the skewness and kurtosis values of all constructions follow a normal distribution. If the absolute values of kurtosis and skewness are 2.0 or less, the data is regarded as regularly distributed, per (Hair, Black, & Babin, 2010).

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM):

Factor analysis and multiple regression analysis are combined in this test. It is used to investigate the structural connection between measurable variables and latent constructs. Evaluating the measurement model and the structural model are the two phases in the SEM process. The relationship between the response items and the underlying latent construct is demonstrated by the measurement model. The researcher must assess the model for one dimensionality, validity, and dependability prior to building the structural model. The structural model illustrates the links between the constructs in the study.

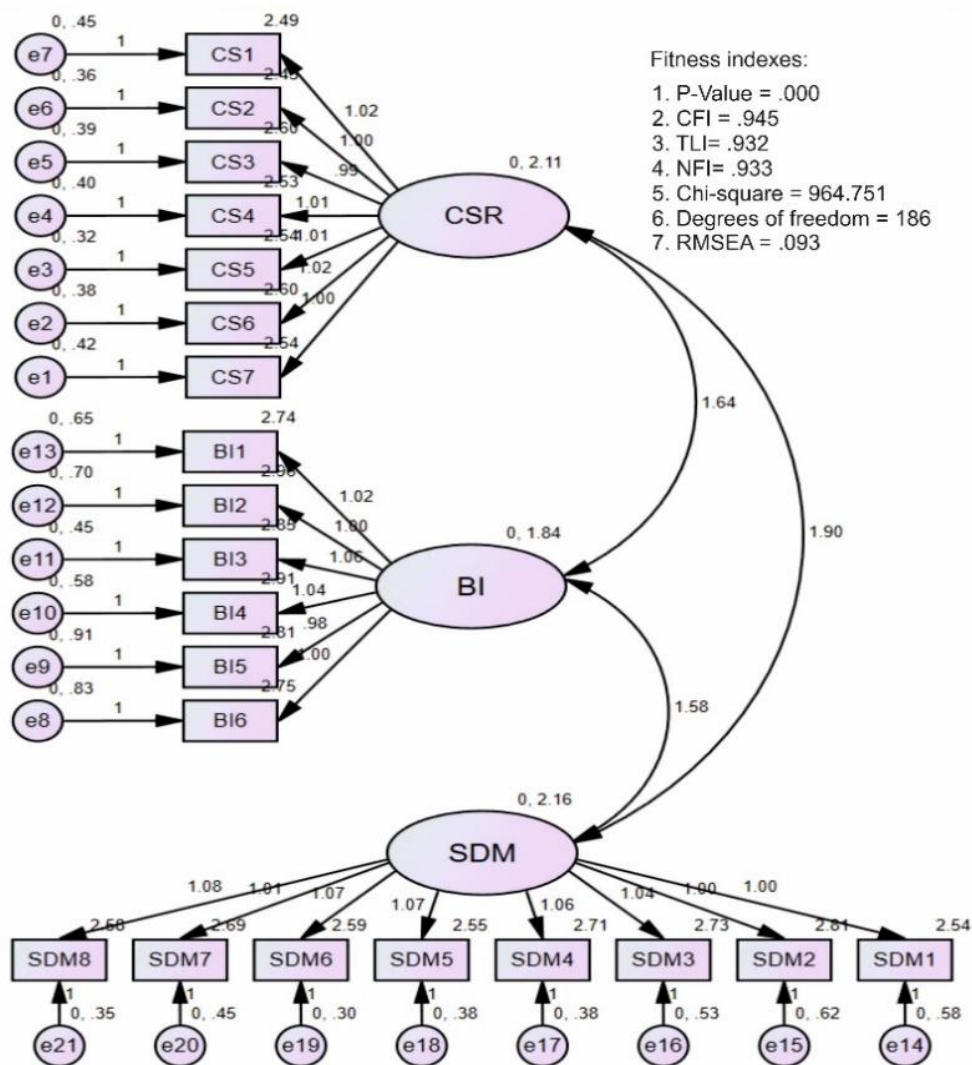


Figure 2: The Measurement Model Combining All Constructs (Unstandardized Estimates)

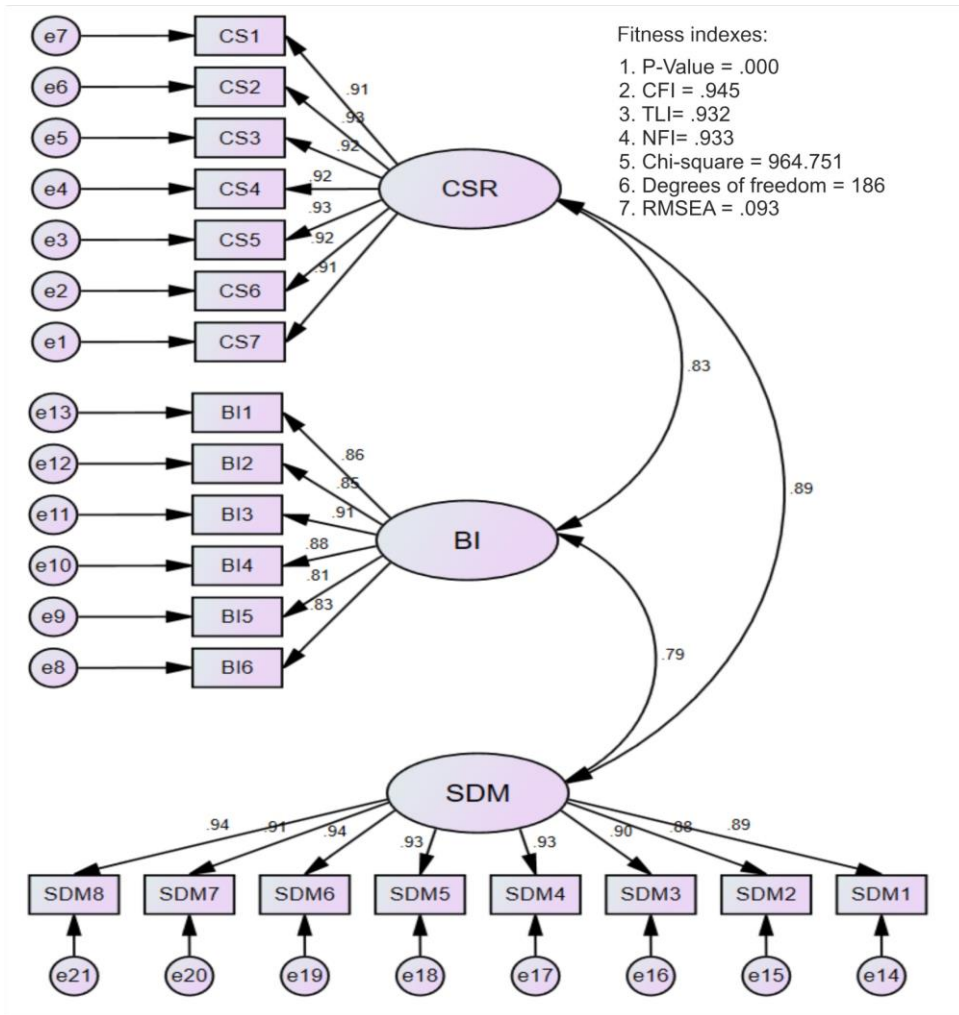


Figure 3: The Measurement Model Combining All Constructs (standardized Estimates)

In examining the impact of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and brand image on students' decision-making in Vietnam's higher education post-COVID-19 pandemic, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was conducted using AMOS. The model fit was assessed using several key indices: Chi-square, Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Normed Fit Index (NFI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and the model's degrees of freedom (df).

The Chi-square value (χ^2) was 964.751 with 186 degrees of freedom (df), indicating that the model's fit might not be perfect. However, the Chi-square test is sensitive to sample size, often leading to significant results in large samples (Bentler & Bonett, 1980). Therefore, additional fit indices are considered for a more comprehensive evaluation (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Comparative Fit Index (CFI) was .945, and the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) was .932. Both indices are above the commonly accepted threshold of .90, suggesting a

good fit of the model to the data (Bentler, 1990; Hu & Bentler, 1999). The Normed Fit Index (NFI) was .933, also exceeding the .90 threshold, further supporting the model's adequacy (Bentler & Bonett, 1980).

The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was .093, which is slightly above the recommended threshold of .08 (Browne & Cudeck, 1993). An RMSEA value less than .08 indicates a reasonable error of approximation, but values between .08 and .10 represent mediocre fit, and values above .10 are considered poor (MacCallum et al., 1996). Therefore, while the RMSEA suggests a need for model improvement, the other indices imply an overall acceptable fit.

Given the fitness indices, the model demonstrates a satisfactory fit to the data, though it highlights areas for potential refinement. These results are consistent with previous studies that emphasize the importance of CSR and brand image in influencing students' decision-making in the context of higher education (Tan et al., 2022). Future research should explore additional factors that might impact decision-making and further refine the model to improve its fit.

Table 5: The Fitness Indexes Assessment for the Measurement in Figure 2

Name of Category	Name of Index	Index Value	Results
Absolute Fit	RMSEA	.093	Achieved
Incremental Fit	CFI	.945	Achieved
Parsimonious Fit	Chisq/df	964.751/186 ≈ 5	Achieved

Convergence validity and reliability are assessed using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Composite Reliability (CR) procedures after fitness indices have been accepted. 0.455 is the minimal value for AVE, while 0.6 is the lowest value for CR, according to Zainudin et al. (2017). The results show that each idea and component in the measurement model satisfied the required value. This demonstrates that every element of the model in Figure 2 is open to additional examination. The results of AVE for convergent validity and CR for construct validity are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6: The Summary of AVE and CR for Five Constructs

Construct	Items	Factor Loading	AVE	CR
Corporate Social Responsibility	CS1	0.923	0.869	0.979
	CS2	0.936		
	CS3	0.929		
	CS4	0.931		
	CS5	0.943		
	CS6	0.934		
	CS7	0.927		
Brand Image	BI1	0.882	0.779	0.955
	BI2	0.877		
	BI3	0.915		
	BI4	0.900		
	BI5	0.853		
	BI6	0.867		
	SDM1	0.906		

Student's Decision Making	SDM2	0.905	0.859	0.980
	SDM3	0.922		
	SDM4	0.942		
	SDM5	0.933		
	SDM6	0.946		
	SDM7	0.923		
	SDM8	0.937		

R-Square Values

The R-Square values provide insights into the amount of variance explained by the independent variables in the model. The R-Square for Brand Image (BI) was 0.641, indicating that 64.1% of the variance in Brand Image is explained by the model. This suggests a substantial impact of the independent variables on Brand Image. The R-Square for Students' Decision-Making (SDM) was 0.771, indicating that 77.1% of the variance in Students' Decision-Making is explained by the model. This high R-Square value demonstrates a strong explanatory power of the independent variables on students' decision-making processes.

Given the fitness indices and R-Square values, the model demonstrates a satisfactory fit to the data, highlighting the significant role of CSR and brand image in shaping students' decision-making in higher education institutions in Vietnam. The findings are consistent with previous research, emphasizing the importance of CSR and brand image in educational settings (Tan et al., 2022). The high R-Square values suggest that CSR and brand image are critical factors influencing students' choices, providing valuable insights for educational institutions aiming to attract and retain student post-pandemic.

Future research should explore additional factors that might impact decision-making and further refine the model to improve its fit. Additionally, longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into how these relationships evolve over time.

Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing

The path coefficients provide insights into the strength and direction of the relationships between the constructs in the model. Table 7 below summarizes the standardized path coefficients, their significance levels, and the hypotheses tested.

Table 7: The Regression Path of the Coefficient and Its Significance

Hypothesis	Path Coefficient	Beta	p-value	Result
H1	CSR → Decision-Making	$\beta = 0.80$	0.000	Supported
H2	BI → SDM	$\beta = 0.30$	0.001	Supported
H3	CSR → Brand Image	$\beta = 0.60$	0.000	Supported

CSR and Brand Image

The path from Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to Brand Image ($\beta = 0.60$, $p = 0.000$) indicates a strong and statistically significant positive relationship. This supports Hypothesis 3, suggesting that higher levels of CSR activities enhance the brand image of higher education institutions. This finding aligns with prior research indicating that CSR

practices positively influence organizational reputation and perceived value (Du et al., 2010).

CSR and Students' Decision-Making

The path from CSR to Students' Decision-Making ($\beta = 0.80$, $p = 0.000$) is also positive and significant, supporting Hypothesis 1. This result implies that CSR activities directly influence students' decision-making processes when choosing higher education institutions. This direct effect highlights the importance of CSR in attracting students by demonstrating social responsibility and ethical practices (Maignan et al., 1997).

Brand Image and Students' Decision-Making

The path from Brand Image to Students' Decision-Making ($\beta = 0.30$, $p = 0.001$) is significantly positive, supporting Hypothesis 2. This indicates that a positive brand image considerably impacts students' choices, underscoring the critical role of brand perception in the competitive higher education market. Previous studies have shown that brand image significantly affects consumer behavior, including in the education sector (Casidy, 2013).

FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis yielded several key findings:

Impact of CSR on Brand Image: The study found a strong positive relationship between CSR and brand image. This indicates that effective CSR initiatives substantially enhance the brand image of higher education institutions. This aligns with previous research suggesting that CSR practices significantly improve organizational reputation and perceived value (Du et al., 2010).

Impact of CSR on Students' Decision-Making: There is a direct positive effect of CSR on students' decision-making processes. This demonstrates that CSR activities play a critical role in attracting students by showcasing the institution's commitment to social responsibility and ethical practices. This finding is consistent with the literature emphasizing the role of CSR in influencing consumer choices (Maignan et al., 1997).

Impact of Brand Image on Students' Decision-Making: Brand image significantly influences students' decisions when selecting higher education institutions. This underscores the importance of a strong and positive brand perception in a highly competitive educational market. Previous studies have shown that brand image significantly affects consumer behavior, including in the education sector (Casidy, 2013).

Mediating Role of Brand Image: The study revealed that brand image partially mediates the relationship between CSR and students' decision-making. This suggests that while CSR has a direct impact on students' choices, a substantial portion of this influence is exerted through its enhancement of the institution's brand image (Hair et al., 2010).

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed for higher education institutions in Vietnam:

Enhance CSR Initiatives: Institutions should develop and implement comprehensive CSR strategies that not only meet ethical standards but also resonate with students' values and expectations. Effective CSR initiatives can significantly enhance the institution's brand image and appeal.

Promote CSR Activities: Actively communicate and promote CSR activities through various channels, such as social media, campus events, and collaborations with community organizations. Highlighting successful CSR projects can enhance the institution's reputation and attract prospective students who value social responsibility.

Invest in Brand Management: Institutions should focus on building a strong, positive brand image by consistently communicating their values, achievements, and commitment to quality education. A robust brand image can significantly influence students' decision-making and increase enrollment rates.

Integrate CSR in Marketing Strategies: Leverage CSR activities in marketing and recruitment campaigns to differentiate the institution from competitors. Highlighting the institution's commitment to social and environmental issues can attract socially conscious students and improve overall perception.

Conduct Longitudinal Studies: Future research should explore the long-term impact of CSR and brand image on student retention and satisfaction. Longitudinal studies can provide deeper insights into how these relationships evolve over time and inform continuous improvement strategies.

Expand Research Scope: Further studies could investigate the impact of other factors, such as academic quality, employability outcomes, and technological advancements on students' decision-making. Comparative studies across different cultural and regional contexts can also help generalize the findings and provide a broader understanding of the determinants of student choices in higher education.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study highlight the significant roles of CSR and brand image in shaping students' decision-making in Vietnam's higher education sector post-COVID-19. By investing in CSR initiatives and building a strong brand image, institutions can attract and retain students in a competitive market. The results underscore the importance of an integrated approach to CSR and brand management, providing valuable insights for educational institutions aiming to enhance their appeal and achieve sustainable growth.

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