

Analyzing the Impact of Corporate Social Responsibility on Brand Management for Start-Ups: Quantitative Research From Cyprus Businesses

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
CSR, startups, branding, management, reputation	In recent years, many businesses have adopted corporate social responsibility (CSR) to positively influence their macro and micro environment while building their competitive muscles. Many start-ups avoid adopting CSR, pointing to its high cost and invisible, short-term gains. As a result, this study aimed to establish the impact of CSR adoption on brand management. As a broad topic, the research focused on the five primary components of brand management: brand reputation, equity, loyalty, awareness, and recognition. The quantitative research narrowed down to test five hypotheses that sought to determine whether the adoption of CSR by start-ups positively affects brand reputation, equity, loyalty, awareness, and recognition. In completing the research, 228 participants (employees and customers) from 100 sampled Cyprus start-ups participated in answering closed-ended 30-item questionnaires categorized into six main items (CSR, brand reputation, equity, loyalty, awareness, and recognition), each of the five items. Cronbach's alpha and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were adopted as the primary tools to test the Reliability and validity of the test. The results indicated all five hypotheses passed the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with the brand reputation as the most vigorous intensity ($\beta = 0.501$, $t = 11.088$ at $p = 0.000$) and brand recognition with the lowest intensity ($\beta = 0.247$, $t = 4.3856$ and $p = 0.000$) for $p < 0.001$. These results confirmed that the adoption of CSR had a positive impact on brand reputation, equity, awareness, and recognition. The research concluded that CSR significantly impacted brand management, which is crucial for start-ups.

• Introduction

In an increasingly globalized business field, brand management is a crucial intangible asset that determines any company's competitiveness, sustainability, and profitability. It is one of the primary components that define business success. It is a broad term that refers to the marketing strategies enabling an organization to maintain, improve, and advertise its brand and improve customers' perception of its products. It comprises components such as brand reputation, brand equity, brand loyalty, brand awareness, brand recognition, brand name, brand value, and brand image. It goes beyond the company's products to cover the customer relationship, stakeholders, employees, corporate culture, and competitive strategy. Excellent and robust brand management enables the organization to maintain an impeccable reputation, develop longevity and resilience, and enhance its competitiveness in the recent competitive market. As a result, most companies employ every resource and strategy to establish solid and dependable brand management. Recently, a discussion has emerged on the role of Corporate social responsibility (CSR) in building positive and strong brand management for startups.

CSR sparked by increased globalization has been a subject of enormous interest in the academic and business world. It is a business model that requires organizations to be socially and environmentally responsible for their macro and microenvironment, including the public, customers, employees, and other stakeholders (Chen et al., 2021). It also stresses the organization's need to participate in corporate social and other societal activities and be mindful of the effects of its activities on the societal economic, political, social, environmental, and cultural well-being (Ali et al., 2023). CSR believes that ecologically, socially, and sustainably conscious businesses outperform competitors and have a competitive edge.

CSR emerged during the Second World War between 1945 and 1960 due to increased social and environmental movements. Most scholars point to Bowen and Johnson's (1953) "Social

Responsibility of Businessman," which emphasized the need for entrepreneurs to be responsible enough by making decisions and implementing strategies that positively transform society, as the first foundational scholarly article that shed light on CSR. Since then, the CSR scope has broadened significantly to accommodate varied and advanced educational ideas and discoveries (Papa, 2022). For instance, during the 1970s, scholars and business people viewed CSR as the ability of the business to do social good and adopt corporate social performance; in the 1980s, CSR advanced to accommodate business ethics and practices; and during the 1990s, it went further to accommodate global corporate citizenship (Papa, 2022). Today, CSR has become a management component comprising all activities that enable a company to incorporate social and environmental concerns in its operation, becoming wholly responsible and accountable to the public, its stakeholders, and itself.

Businesses are adopting CSR to achieve specific objectives, which may differ from one business to another. Most of them embrace it as a strategy to better their recognition, achieve a positive brand reputation, increase brand loyalty, increase customer satisfaction, outdo their competitors, give back to society, create organizational citizenship, reduce employee turnover, build a positive public image and enhance corporate growth (Galbreath, 2010 and Zhao et al.,2021). As a result, many continuing business organizations adopt CSR to reap its multi-dimensional benefits and positively impact their community, customers, employees, and environment.

In recent years, various scholars and business analysts have done a credible job of assessing CSR in multiple contexts, with the corporate field providing a broad platform for researchers to explore the topic. Primarily, most research revolves around the benefit of adopting CSR, strengthening business leadership, ethics in business operations and activities, how businesses can implement CSR, and the need for organizations to be socially responsible and accountable to their macro and micro environments. Other studies have specialized in adopting CSR to meet various needs and expectations of the organization's stakeholders. According to Yan et al. (2022), most of today's CSR theoretical research primarily investigates the effect of adopting CSR on organizational performance, profitability, and competitiveness.

Ali et al. (2023) further acknowledge that the success of any business depends on community resources upholding the need for corporate coexistence, which is achievable through the adoption of CSR. Supporting their view, Manzoor et al. (2019) pointed out that CSR links and upholds business and community interests, addressing the needs of customers, societies, and employees as the three prominent corporate wings. Influence on these three corporate wings leads to the business's overall success, increases its competitiveness, enhances its performance, and upholds its sustainability in the market due to increased brand recognition, equity, and loyalty. These theoretical findings agree with most quantitative CSR research carried out by various scholars, including Araújo et al. (2023), Mahmood & Bashir (2020), and Wang (2020).

- **Research Problem**

Though most continuing businesses have adopted CSR as part of their strategy to gain a competitive edge, improve their brand recognition, equity, and loyalty, and increase their sustainability in the market, most startups shy away from adopting CSR, pointing to its high cost and invisible, short-term gains. Most view CSR as a lucrative strategy that is only beneficial to already established organizations. They focus on the short-term financial goals and base root establishment rather than the CSR's long-term social and environmental gains. Following the existence of varied and numerous resources demands and short-term profit gain desires, most startups sideline CSR, listing it among the last priorities. These views limit the adoption of CSR among startups.

Most startups need more knowledge of the significance and impact of CSR brand management. The need for more understanding of the short and long-term effects of CSR reduces the ability of startups

to adopt CSR as one of their competitive and growth tools. Research by Oduro et al. (2021) established that the lack of sufficient knowledge on the importance of CSR, ignorance, and insufficient funds are the three primary challenges that limit the ability of startups and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to implement CSR. Such challenges require detailed research to determine whether adopting CSR enhances brand management (reputation, recognition, loyalty, awareness, and equity) among startups.

Moreover, the existing literature about impacts of CSR on brand management for startups is very shallow. While most research has been done on the influence of CSR on the organization's performance, profitability, and sustainability, only a handful of research exists on the impact of CSR on brand management for startups and SMEs. As a result, there is a need to carry out detailed research to determine whether CSR has any significant impact on startup's brand management and whether they should prioritize it.

- **Purpose of the Research**

The primary objective of this quantitative research is to determine the impact of CSR on brand management for startups focusing on Cyprus. It seeks to provide detailed and empirical evidence on how CSR influences startups' brand equity, awareness, recognition, loyalty, and reputation and avail appropriate knowledge to bridge the existing literature gap. The researcher seeks to attain the following research objectives in completing this research.

- Determine whether CSR affects critical components of brand management, particularly brand image, reputation, awareness, equity, recognition, and loyalty for startups
- Examine the effects of adopting CSR for startups and other SMEs
- Avail the appropriate knowledge and findings to bridge the existing research gap on the effect of CSR adoption on brand management for the smart-ups.

- **Significance of Research**

This research is crucial in obtaining crucial information about the impact of CSR on brand management for startups. It avails empirical evidence on the significance of CSR on the five key brand management components: brand reputation, awareness, equity, recognition, and loyalty for startups. Such findings will act as crucial decision-making tools, helping startups make appropriate decisions on adopting CSR as one of their competitive and management strategies. Secondly, the research will contribute heavily to the existing literature regarding CSR and brand management in startups. It plays a critical role in bridging the current literature gaps and creating value for the existing limited literature on the impact of CSR on startups' brand management. Such literature contribution will act as a baseline and guide for future research. The study also enhances corporate sustainability, policy implementation, and benchmarking strategy to decide CSR implementation and timing, significantly influencing the performance and motivation of startup businesses in Cyprus and other countries around the globe.

- **Literature Review and Hypothesis Development**

The concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) has recently become popular, attracting significant interest from business research scholars. Though the increased number of researchers and scholars and the broad nature of the concept have led to numerous definitions, leading to a lack of universally accepted definitions, most are congruent. While some view CSR as a business's legal accountability, others view it as ethical and socially accepted organizational behaviors and as a general responsibility of the company on its macro and micro environment (Araújo et al., 2023).

These perspective variations among researchers and scholars call for a common ground that summarizes and links them to a more solid and comprehensive definition.

According to Licandro et al. (2023), CSR is a management strategy requiring the business to minimize the performance externalities on its stakeholders, environment, and society. In their definition, the authors emphasized the view of CSR as a management philosophy and management of externalities. Adding to this comprehensive definition, Chen et al. (2021) highlighted that CSR requires organizations to be socially, ethically, and environmentally responsible to their macro and microenvironment, including the public, customers, employees, shareholders, and other stakeholders. It also stresses the organization's need to participate in corporate social and other societal activities and be mindful of the effects of its activities on the societal economic, political, social, environmental, and cultural well-being (Ali et al., 2023). These comprehensive definitions reveal the five expected elements of CSR.

- CSR has a voluntary character, enabling business organizations to adopt it at will, not as a requirement by law.
 - It focuses on linking up the business, stakeholders, environment, and society in general
 - CSR focuses on the sustainable development community
 - CSR is a strategic choice that benefits the company as well as the society
 - It is ethical to require organizations to operate with an ethical mindset to positively influence society's environment, economy, and well-being while enjoying numerous benefits, such as a customer base from the community.
- **CSR and Brand Reputation**

Rust et al. (2021) defines *brand reputation* as the stakeholders' overall perception, impression, view, and feeling regarding a brand. It incorporates attributes such as stakeholder appreciation, prestige, flexibility, and dynamism that create value and relevancy for the business in the competitive market. Building a solid brand reputation enables the business to meet the increased and dynamic consumer demands and compete effectively, hence enhancing the company's sustainability, continuity, and competitiveness in the market (Ali et al., 2023). Positive brand reputation increases customer confidence, trust and loyalty hence increasing sales, profits, and bottom-line growth and enhancing the organization's competitiveness, productivity, and sustainability in the market. According to Ali et al. (2023), a positive link exists between CSR and brand reputation as characterized by stakeholders' perception and trust in the brand. According to their finding, customers' view of the company's CSR reflects their perception of its brand (Lee & Tao, 2020). A strong view about an organization's CSR boost the stakeholder's perception on the overall performance of the organization hence building a positive reputation for the organization. Therefore, adopting CSR enables startups to create a more substantial brand reputation. This literature finding led to the formation of the following hypothesis.

H1. CSR positively impacts startups' brand reputation.

- **CSR and Brand Equity**

Mahmood and Bashir (2020) define *brand equity* as the brand's value in the market. They added that brand equity encompasses the value that the consumers and other stakeholders add or deduct from the brand's name, symbol and assets. Agreeing with this perspective, Araújo et al. (2023) define brand equity as creating and improving the brand asset's value to increase customer satisfaction while enhancing the company's competitiveness. Such value is described by the macro and micro performance comprising three fundamental categories: psychological brand value, behavioral, and financial. Creating this brand value depends on the customers' existing knowledge, experiences, and

perceptions (Araújo et al., 2023). It is paramount to note that while customers buy products to gain value, they choose products for empathy, preferring the brand with better quality (Mahmood & Bashir, 2020). Therefore, brand equity should convey trust, quality, responsibility, and ethics. Since adopting CSR helps the company to build trust, understand customer quality preference through field interactions, demonstrate accountability, and enhance ethics in its performance, the researcher developed the following hypothesis:

H2: CSR positively impacts the brand equity.

- **CSR and Brand Loyalty**

For today's businesses and other organizations to remain relevant in the highly competitive business world, they must do all they can to make their product consumer's favorite. Such action has led to the creation of brand loyalty, which is defined as the consumer's unwavering commitment to buy and rebuy a preferred product consistently despite the situational sway or influence of other competing brands (Zhang et al., 2023). This reasoning implies that customers are convinced to purchase from their preferred brands despite extreme brand competition, such as price cuts and positioning wars. Due to the market's competitive nature, most businesses cannot earn customers' loyalty. A company that can add value, positively influence its customers and provide extra services while upholding the quality of its products is likely to win customers and earn their loyalty (Zhang et al., 2023). For startups whose market is characterized by unstable brand differentiation, new and sophisticated customers, and fragmented markets, the adoption of CSR is a critical asset in attaining customer loyalty due to its ability to build corporate and positive relationships with the organizational stakeholders, including customers (Dapi & Phiri, 2015). Based on the above establishment, the following hypothesis arises:

H3: The implementation of CSR by startups positively impacts their brand loyalty.

- **CSR and Brand Awareness**

Brand awareness is an important concept that determines any business's progress, competitiveness, profitability, and performance, including startups. It refers to the customers' understanding and familiarity with a given brand, which enables them to differentiate a brand from similar brands (Ismael, 2022). It enhances customer decision-making, market functions, marketing mix, and brand equity (Zhang,2020). Brand awareness is the foundation of brand recognition, loyalty, and equity. With brand awareness, customers acknowledge the existence of a particular business organization and its product. According to Ismael (2022), brand awareness accumulates all the linkages connected with the brand in the customers' cognition, creating an emotional and sociological relationship, hence becoming the most critical component of brand equity. Therefore, brand awareness is an asset that enhances various outcomes, including customers' satisfaction, loyalty, and intention to make extra purchases. CSR is a critical tool that boosts brand advertisement, increasing brand awareness among their customer base (Zhang,2020). These findings led to the creation of the following hypothesis:

H4: Adopting CSR increases brand awareness for startups.

- **CSR and Brand Recognition**

Brand recognition is the second part after brand awareness. It refers to the ability of the customers to note and appropriately identify the brand's attributes, differentiating it from the other brands. It occurs when the customers can recognize the brand visually and auditory, even without reading, seeing, or hearing the brand name. At such a level, customers go beyond knowing that the brand exists to demonstrate a clearer understanding of the brand's attributes, such as log, slogan, and color (Araújo et al.,2023). Increased brand recognition enables the company to increase customer loyalty and trust, increase customer referrals, reduce price sensitivity, and improve brand equity. Adopting

CSR is a crucial strategy for both startups and continuing businesses to enhance brand awareness, recognition, and recall (Araújo et al.,2023). These research findings led to the creation of the hypothesis below:

H5: The adoption of CSR has positively influenced brand recognition for startups.

The above discussion highlights the impact of CSR on the five primary components of brand management (brand reputation, recognition, equity, loyalty, and awareness). The literature reveals a positive relationship between each of the five components of the adoption of CSR activities. This relationship is represented by the figure 1 below.

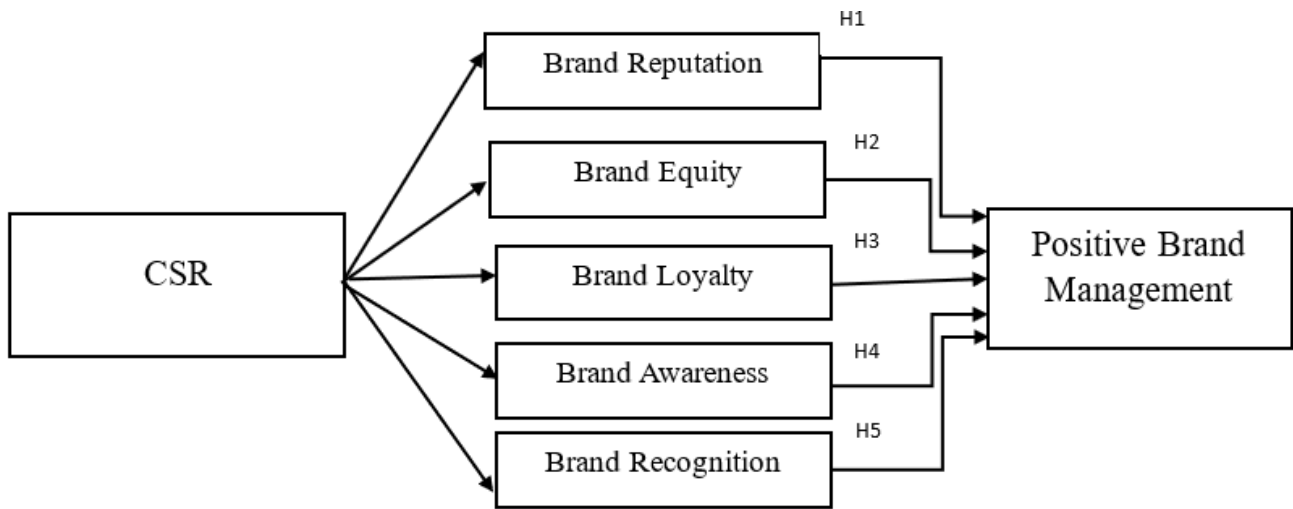


Figure 1: Structural Model

- **Methodology**
- **Research Methods**

The research adopts a quantitative research design to gather information and test five above-identified hypotheses relating to the impact of CSR on brand management for start-ups. This research design enabled the researcher to gather more excellent knowledge and develop an objective conclusion supported by statistical evidence. The researcher employed a structured, closed-ended, thirty-question questionnaire to collect the data.

- **Population and Sampling**

The study was conducted in Cyprus, in Europe, primarily targeting the 446 start-ups registered in 2022 nationwide. To achieve its objective, this study targeted 240 participants, composting employees, and customers visiting 100 randomly sampled start-ups. Each start-up had to provide at least one employee and customer. The researcher conducted a pretest with 12 participants, six customers and six employees from six start-ups, to determine the validity and reliability of the research. Following successful and efficient implementation and appropriate response, the study adopted the questionnaire with no single alteration. Out of the 240 questionnaires distributed and filled out by the staff and customers, 12 were rejected due to incompleteness or misleading information, making the total analyzable sample size 228. The table below summarizes the demographic attributes of the participants

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics

Respondent demographics (n= 228)			
Classification	Category	Frequency	percentage
Gender	Male	136	59.6%
	Female	92	40.4%
Age	18-29	98	43.0%
	30-39	72	31.6%
	40-49	37	16.2%
	50 and above	21	9.2%
Nature	Employee	98	43%
	Customers	130	57%
Education	PHD	15	6.6%
	Masters' degrees	36	15.8%
	Bachelor degree	132	57.9%
	others	45	19.7%

• **Measures and Variables**

The research adopted a multi-item scale as the primary measure for the main constructs and single-item or categorical indicators for the control variable. To avoid baseness, the researcher separated predictor and criterion variables. The following were specific measures adopted for the variable.

CSR: the primary aim of the study was to determine the impact of CSR on brand management for start-ups. As a result, CSR was an independent variable. Five of the thirty items assessed the participants' corporate social responsibility (CSR) knowledge. In this assessment, the participants were required to respond to the five closed rating questions assessing their CSR state and Knowledge.

Dependent variable: This research adopted five components of brand management (brand reputation, brand equity, brand loyalty, brand awareness, and brand recognition) whose effectiveness and efficiency depended on the CSR adoption by the start-ups. In developing the questionnaires, the research adopted five-point Linkert-type scales (1 strongly disagree, 2- disagree, 3- neutral, 4 – agree, 5 – strongly agree) as its primary instrument to investigate these five components. The questionnaire was statement-based, asking the participants to rate the influence of CSR on each of the five brand management categories. Each category had five items with five Linkert-type scale options. The participants were to rate the statements by picking only one option out of the five possible rating scale options. The reliability of the scale was determined by calculating Cronbach's alpha.

Control variable: To control the research, the researcher used a variety of measures, such as firm age, the number of participants per business, and the nature of the company. The researcher also restricted the number of participants to two or three, each consisting of an employee and a customer from each of 100 start-up business established by 2022 in Cyprus. The number and composition of participants were determined by observation, and the nature of the organization, was determined by assessment of the company registration database to determine the year of establishment.

- **Results and Analysis**
- **Reliability Test Analysis**

The researcher carried out the reliability test to determine the scale's reliability. In this test, Cronbach's alpha measured the internal consistency to choose the item's closeness. Table 2 below summarizes Cronbach's alpha calculation for the research results.

Table 2:Reliability Test

No.	Construct	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha	Variable types
1.	CSR	5	0.818	independent
2.	Brand reputation	5	0.892	Dependent
3.	Brand equity	5	0.835	Dependent
4.	Brand loyalty	5	0.801	Dependent
5.	Brand awareness	5	0.823	Dependent
6.	Brand recognition	5	0.813	Dependent.

Reliability in the form of Cronbach's α was calculated from excel spreadsheet using the formula

Where K= Number of items

V_i = Variance of every item

V_t = Variance of total scale

The values' reliability was more than the Hulin et al.'s (2001) limit of 0.7, implying that they were reliable enough for a statistical test. The reliability coefficient for CSR, which acted as a control and dependent variable, was 0.818, implying that it was reliable enough to allow analysis. The other five dependent variables, which were brand reputation, brand equity, brand equity, brand loyalty, brand awareness, and brand recognition, also had a good coefficient of 0.892, 0.835, 0.801, 0.823, and 0.813, respectively see Tables 2 and 3. These coefficients exceeded Hulin et al.'s (2001) cut-off reliability coefficient of 0.7, indicating their reliability and validity in completing the research.

- **Descriptive Statistics**

The mean of the data ranges between 3.77 to 3.913. while the standard deviation ranges from 0.634 to 0.884, indicating that most respondents agreed with the statement presented in the scale. These values were obtained from the grouped Responses of each construct, as indicated in Table 3 below.

Table 3:Descriptive Statistics

Ratings	1	2	3	4	5		Mean	VAR	Standard Dev	Cronbach's α
CSR							3.770175	0.555042	0.745011	0.818211
CSR1	4	13	40	86	85	4.030702				
CSR 2	1	8	47	97	74	4.017544				
CSR3	0	5	41	85	99	4.245614				
CSR4	0	0	53	97	78	4.109649				

CSR5	42	87		54	40	4	2.447368				
Brand Reputation (BR)								3.836842	0.782408	0.884538	0.892341
BR1	0	5		54	78	91	4.118421				
BR2	0	0		23	110	95	4.315789				
BR3	42	79		74	24	0	2.27193				
BR4	0	0		24	101	91	4.083333				
BR5	0	3		40	99	96	4.394737				
Brand Equity (BE)								3.913158	0.59789	0.773233	0.834567
BE1	2	8		29	98	91	4.175439				
BE2	0	0		45	90	93	4.210526				
BE3	5	5		39	103	95	4.469298				
BE4	52	52		74	47	3	2.548246				
BE5	3	2		43	87	93	4.162281				
Brand Loyalty (BL)								3.844737	0.402485	0.634417	0.801045
BL1	1	13		35	90	89	4.109649				
BL2	0	5		40	102	81	4.135965				
BL3	0	1		48	80	99	4.214912				
BL4	0	8		50	93	77	4.048246				
BL5	51	54		54	47	22	2.714912				
Band Awareness (BA)								3.880702	0.558657	0.747433	0.823454
BA1	0	2		33	104	89	4.22807				
BA2	0	0		28	122	78	4.219298				
BA3	0	4		34	98	92	4.219298				
BA4	0	0		31	122	75	4.192982				

BA5	22	98		74	30	4	2.54386				
Brand Recognition (BRC)								3.723684	0.497672	0.705459	0.813457
BRC1	22	84		58	44	20	2.807018				
BRC2	0	1		28	115	84	4.236842				
BRC3	0	0		12	119	92	4.263158				
BRC4	0	1		34	112	81	4.197368				
BRC5	12	74		58	44	40	3.114035				

Skewness and kurtosis are other critical, descriptive measures that help determine the nature of the data distribution. For a normal distribution, skewness and kurtosis must fall between -1.96 to +1.96. Upon calculating the skewness and kurtosis using an Excel spreadsheet, the values fall within this range, with the extremes being -0.391 to 0.272, as shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Skewness and Kurtosis

Construct	Mean	Mode	Standard deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
CSR	3.777	4	0.745	-0.29932886	-0.15575
Brand Reputation	3.837	4	0.885	-0.18418079	0.06288
Brand Equity	3.913	4	0.773	-0.11254851	0.271561
Brand Loyalty	3.845	4	0.634	-0.2444795	0.123429
Brand Awareness	3.881	4	0.747	-0.15930388	0.213452
Brand Recognition	3.724	4	0.705	-0.39148936	0.324901

- **Confirmatory factor analysis**

The researcher conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using SPSS Amos 22 to assess the psychometric property and establish the correlation between the constructs. In completing the CFA, the researcher calculated the factor loadings and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for all six constructs. The estimated factory loading and AVE values for all variables met Hair et al.'s (1998) thresholds of 0.7 and 0.5, respectively, confirming that all measurements met minimum satisfactory convergent validity. In determining whether the items of a specific variable correlate with the others, the researcher constructed discriminant validity, as shown in Table 5 below. The researcher then tested the discriminant validity using the square root of the AVE values and highlighted them for better visibility and distinction from the correlation values see Table 5. The calculations established that the AVE values were higher than inter-construct correlation values. Hence, the research concluded that the discriminant validity is supported, implying that the variables measure varied aspects that do not overlap.

Table 5: Validity Measure

	AVE	CSR	Brand Reputation	Brand Equity	Brand Loyalty	Brand Awareness	Brand Recognition
CSR	0.723	0.850					
Brand Reputation	0.659	0.592	0.812				
Brand Equity	0.698	0.641	-	0.835			
Brand Loyalty	0.601	0.512	-	-	0.775		
Brand Awareness	0.639	0.659	-	-	-	0.7993	
Brand Recognition	0.681	0.435	-	-	-	-	0.831

• **Regression Analysis**

This research also adopted regression analysis to forecast the value of the variables about one another to test the five previously identified hypotheses. The regression focused on determining the relationship between the CSR (independent variables) and the other five brand management components (Brand reputation, equity, loyalty, awareness, and recognition). In this section, P-value and Beta estimates were the primary considerations for rejecting or accepting the hypothesis. The hypothesis with a P-value less than 0.05 was accepted. Below is a summary of the five hypotheses and their state of acceptance according to their value.

The regression analysis outcome for the relationship between CSR and brand reputation results in $\beta = 0.501$, $t = 11.088$ at $p < 0.001$, hence accepting the first hypothesis that CSR positively impacts start-ups' organizational reputation. Regarding the relationship between CSR and brand equity, the results indicated $\beta = 0.435$, $t = 6.639$ at $p < 0.001$, hence accepting the second hypothesis: CSR positively impacts brand equity. The results also justified the third hypothesis: implementation of CSR by start-ups positively impacts their brand loyalty with $\beta = 0.282$, $t = 4.247$ at $p < 0.001$. The study also supported the fourth hypothesis, pointing out that adopting CSR increases brand awareness for start-ups, as justified by $\beta = 0.476$, $t = 9.501$ at $p < 0.001$. Finally, the results also supported the fifth hypothesis, indicating that the adoption of CSR has positively influenced brand recognition for start-ups, as justified by $\beta = 0.247$, $t = 4.3856$ at $p < 0.001$. These results are summarized in Table 6 below.

Table 6:Regression Analysis

Hypotheses	Relationship	(β) estimates	t-Value	St. Error	p-value	Decision
H1	CSR-brand reputation	0.501	11.088	0.058	0.000	Accepted
H2	CSR – Brand Equity	0.435	6.639	0.054	0.000	Accepted
H3	CSR – Brand Loyalty	0.282	4.247	0.042	0.000	Accepted
H4	CSR – Brand Awareness	0.476	9.501	0.051	0.000	Accepted
H5	CSR – Brand recognition	0.247	4.3856	0.060	0.000	Accepted

- **Discussion**

The primary aim of this study was to determine the effect of CSR on the five management components (Brand reputation, equity, loyalty awareness, and recognition). Specifically, the empirical study sought to test the five identified hypotheses about impact of CSR utilization on brand management in startups. The empirical results supported all five hypotheses, agreeing with the previous research highlighted below.

The first hypothesis predicted a positive impact of CSR on the startup's brand reputation. The empirical results of $\beta = 0.501$, $t = 11.088$, and p -value of 0.000 supports the hypothesis at $p < 0.001$. These results further reveal that adopting CSR positively impacts the brand reputation more significantly and with a higher intensity than the other brand management components. These findings uphold the research by Lee & Tao (2020) associating the implementation of CSR with brand reputation development. As highlighted by Papa (2022), adopting CSR develops good publicity, strengthens the company's image, develops trust with the customers, motivates employees, promotes reliability, and enhances solvency, which all together builds the startup reputation. This reason implies that the startups that implement CSR have a better brand reputation and more decisive competitive edge than their counterparts. Startups should allocate significant resources for the implementation of CSR as early as possible.

In addition to the brand image, the result supported the second hypothesis upholding the positive impact of CSR on brand equity. Such support was evident from the empirical results; $\beta = 0.435$, $t = 6.639$ and $p = 0.000$ at $p < 0.00$. As for brand reputation, these results confirm the significant impact of CSR on brand equity. The results agree with Mahmood and Bashir (2020) that adopting CSR enhances organizational brand equity. As Zhao et al. (2021) pointed out, the benefit of adopting CSR on brand equity is a standout, and its impact cannot be ignored. CSR enables the company to advertise its products, develop a good relationship with its stakeholders, and increase its competitive ability. Therefore, startups need to grab these benefits and adopt CSR to build their brand equity, as supported by the research findings and the literature review.

The third hypothesis predicted that adopting CSR will positively impact the brand loyalty of startups. This study's empirical results ($\beta = 0.282$, $t = 4.247$ and $p = 0.000$) supported this hypothesis. Such findings agree with Dapi & Phiri (2015), who established a positive correlation between CSR implementation and brand loyalty. Though attainment of brand loyalty is a long, complex, and involving process affected by numerous factors, including brand quality, this research established that adopting CSR is vital in enhancing brand loyalty. Adopting CSR strengthens the bond between the customers and the organization, increasing customer attainment and retention abilities. As a result, startups need to take a more proactive approach to societal and environmental issues as an additional strategy to understand their customers, know their demands, understand their product perspectives, meet new ones, retain the existing ones, and increase brand loyalty.

The research finding further justified the fourth hypothesis that predicted a positive impact of CSR on brand awareness for startups. The results $\beta = 0.476$, $t = 9.501$, and $P = 0.000$ indicate a significant effect of CSR on brand awareness. These results support the finding by Ismael (2022), who concluded that CSR is a critical tool that enables companies to advertise their brand, hence increasing brand awareness among their customer base and enhancing various outcomes, including customer satisfaction, loyalty, and their intention to make extra purchases. startups should therefore adopt CSR as a strategy to increase their brand awareness and sales.

Similarly, the research accepted the last hypothesis that predicted a positive impact of CSR on brand recognition. Though it points out a less significant impact of CSR on brand recognition than all four brand management components, its effects must be addressed. As presented by the result $\beta = 0.247$,

$t = 4.3856$, $p = 0.000$, CSR positively affects brand recognition. This research finding agrees with Araújo et al. (2023) that the adoption of CSR by organizations helps them expose their brand images and properties, including color, logos, and slogans, to their customers, enhancing brand recognition among them. As the startups participate in various SCR activities, such as community work, they can interact with their customers, emphasizing critical brand identities that help them differentiate the products from other suppliers. Therefore, adopting CSR helps startups build a strong brand image, enhancing brand recognition among customers.

• Conclusions

This research analyzed the impact of CSR on brand management, focusing on the five main components: brand reputation, equity, loyalty, awareness, and recognition. Empirical results from a quantitative research sampling 228 participants from 100 Cyprus' startups established a positive correlation between CSR and the five brand management components. The regression test further confirmed the following five hypotheses.

- H1: CSR positively impacts startups' organizational reputation
- H2: CSR positively impacts brand equity.
- H3: The implementation of CSR by startups positively impacts their brand loyalty.
- H4: Adopting CSR increases brand awareness for startups.
- H5: The adoption of CSR has positively influenced brand recognition for startups.

Accepting all five hypotheses implied that adopting CSR positively impacts the five components of brand management, affecting brand management as a whole. These results reveal that adopting CSR enables startups to gain a more substantial brand reputation, equity, loyalty, awareness, and recognition. These results provide a more detailed analysis that sheds light on the need to adopt CSR for startups.

The results were consistent with previous studies affirming a positive relationship between CSR adoption and the five management components. Such consensus demonstrates the importance of adopting CSR to improve brand reputation, equity, loyalty, awareness, and recognition. Therefore, adopting CSR is a critical asset that enables startups to enhance their competitiveness, sustainability, and performance. These results are vital in motivating startups and small and medium organizations to adopt CSR since their short-term and long-term benefits exceed the cost of CSR. The study also offers business and academic scholars' significant insight by providing a baseline for further research.

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