Enriching Competitiveness through Corporate Social Responsibility: A Study of Service-Based Enterprises in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This research paper examines the connection between corporate social responsibility and corporate social performance in the service-based enterprises sector in Zimbabwe. The existing literature lacks consensus on how CSR initiatives can enhance competitiveness, particularly in social business orientation. The study proposes three theories highlighting environmental, social, and governance frameworks as critical elements for achieving sustainable performance in these organisations. The data for this study were collected using a cross-sectional research design. 650 participants who hold senior managerial positions in their organisations in the Harare region completed an online questionnaire. The SmartPLS 4.0 software was used to analyse data and apply the partial least squares approach. This approach helped identify the interrelationships among the measurement components. The empirical results highlight the significance of environmental and philanthropic factors as key drivers of sustainable competitiveness. These findings can assist in strategically managing corporate social responsibility by enabling companies to tailor their social engagement strategies to local environments and specific company contexts. Our research findings can potentially assist managers in developing countries to prioritise their corporate social responsibility activities beyond the charitable quest. By doing so, they can effectively distinguish their engagement and social business initiatives from other organisations in the market.

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Introduction

The adoption of corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies and frameworks has increased as companies recognise the importance of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors. This trend is due to the need to improve sustainability performance, meet investor and community demands, and mitigate risks such as shareholder activism and divestment. Multiple frameworks are adopted to effectively report ESG impact, highlighting the growing significance of CSR considerations in the corporate world (Homer & Gill, 2022[1]; Kolli & Srikanth, 2022[2]; Cowton et al., 2019[3]; Elkington & van Dijk, 2017[4]; Carroll, 1991[5]).

On the one hand, CSR initiatives enable companies to support the growth and prosperity of the communities where they do business, addressing societal issues and improving people's lives through funding social and environmental projects. This perspective positively affects communities and can lead to a more substantial reputation and brand image for businesses, resulting in increased customer loyalty and positive word-of-mouth recommendations (Allui & Pinto, 2022[6]; Randrianasolo & Semenov, 2022[7]; Hossain et al., 2019[8]; Makanyeza et al., 2018[9]). CSR can also give companies a competitive edge by attracting clients, investors, and skilled workers who view them as more moral and responsible (Wickert, 2021[10]; Ajina et al., 2019[11]; Park & Kim, 2018[12]).

Furthermore, CSR initiatives improve stakeholder engagement and satisfaction by enhancing consumers' opinions of a brand's reputation, trust and loyalty. This interaction fosters positive relationships, establishes shared values and objectives, and can contribute to national development initiatives and the building of social capital (Al-Abdallah & Ahmed, 2018)[13].

However, there are arguments against CSR, particularly for under-capitalised and smaller businesses. Implementing CSR initiatives can financially burden these entities, diverting resources from other crucial business operations like expansion or research and development. Some studies suggest that CSR may not directly impact profitability and cannot guarantee increased sales or financial success (Nashchekina et al., 2023[14]; Respati & Oktaviani, 2022[15]).

Moreover, the emphasis on CSR has led to increased global pressure on businesses to engage in responsible management activities. This pressure can create burdens and expectations that challenge balancing social and economic objectives. There are divergent viewpoints on the nature of CSR, with some customers arguing that it is a mandatory duty

for all businesses. In contrast, others see it as a voluntary act of goodwill. These mixed views can pose difficulties when implementing CSR initiatives and meeting societal norms, values, and expectations (Agyei et al., 2022[16]; Kaplan & McMillan, 2020[17]; Eveland et al., 2018[18]; Russo, 2016[19]).

Nevertheless, adopting CSR strategies and frameworks has increased as companies recognise the importance of ESG factors. CSR initiatives can bring benefits such as community support, improved reputation, and competitive advantage. However, there are challenges and potential drawbacks, particularly for smaller businesses, regarding financial burden and the pressure to meet societal expectations. Balancing social and economic objectives and navigating divergent viewpoints on the nature of CSR can also be challenging. The significance of CSR considerations in the corporate world is growing, but a balanced approach is necessary to address the benefits and challenges associated with CSR implementation.

This paper highlights a research gap between CSR and corporate social performance (CSP) in Zimbabwe's service-based enterprises industry. While the benefits of CSR are known, there is a limited body of research on how CSR initiatives can contribute to competitiveness in this context. Therefore, the research problem investigates the relationship between CSR and CSP in Zimbabwe's service-based enterprises' industry. Specifically, the study aims to answer the following research questions:

- **RQ1**: Does the CSR economic responsibility dimension in Zimbabwe's service-based enterprises industry relate to corporate social performance?
- **RQ2**: Does the CSR ethical responsibility dimension in Zimbabwe's service-based enterprises industry relate to corporate social performance?
- **RQ3**: Does the CSR environment responsibility dimension in Zimbabwe's service-based enterprises' industry relate to corporate social performance?
- **RQ4**: Does the CSR philanthropic responsibility dimension in Zimbabwe's service-based enterprises industry relate to corporate social performance?

By addressing these research questions, the study aims to provide valuable insights for businesses in the service-based enterprises industry in Zimbabwe and contribute to the existing literature on CSR and corporate social performance.

Literature review

Corporate social responsibility theories

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a concept that has been widely discussed and defined in various ways (Asiaei et al., 2023[20]; Asiaei et al., 2021[21]; Kang et al., 2016[22]; Dahlsrud, 2008[23]). One commonly accepted concept is the triple bottom line, which emphasises the importance of economic value while considering environmental and social impacts (Elkington, 2018[24]). This comprehensive perspective recognises that businesses should positively contribute to society and the environment (Elkington, 2018[24]). Stakeholder theory and the triple bottom line theory complement to

enhance the comprehensiveness and holistic nature of CSR and sustainable business practices (Cosma et al., 2022[25]; Aboud & Yang, 2022[26]; Ajina et al., 2019[11]; Fernando & Lawrence, 2014[27]; Avram & Avasilcai, 2014[28]).

Stakeholder theory emphasises including all stakeholders' interests and rights in decision-making, promoting transparency, accountability, and ethical conduct (Uslu & Engün, 2021[29]; Wong & Dhanesh, 2017[30]; Carroll, 1991[5]). Legitimacy theory complements stakeholder theory by highlighting the need for organisations to fulfil social contracts and maintain social legitimacy (Chen McCain et al., 2019[31]; Fernando & Lawrence, 2014[27]; Avram & Avasilcai, 2014[28]). Organisations can enhance their reputation and gain stakeholder trust by adhering to ethical standards and meeting community expectations. Voluntary disclosures legitimise organisations' actions and demonstrate their commitment to responsible business practices (Elkington & van Dijk, 2017[4]; Fernando & Lawrence, 2014[27]).

The triple bottom line theory integrates economic, social, and environmental factors into business practices (Elkington & van Dijk, 2017[4]; KsiężaK & FischBach, 2017[32]). By implementing an integrated reporting approach, organisations can measure and report their performance across these three dimensions, enhancing their understanding of their societal and environmental impact (Ajina et al., 2019)[11]. This theory promotes the integration of economic progress and sustainability, fostering long-term success and resilience.

Integrating stakeholder, legitimacy, and triple-bottom-line theories can lead to a more equitable and enduring approach to CSR. Organisations can achieve a harmonious balance between financial objectives and their commitment to addressing social and environmental issues (Carroll & Laasch, 2020[33]; Elkington & van Dijk, 2017[4]). By considering stakeholder interests and rights, fulfilling social contracts, and balancing economic, social, and environmental factors, organisations can contribute to societal well-being and ensure long-term success (Fernando & Lawrence, 2014[27]; Elkington & van Dijk, 2017[4]; Freeman & Dmytriyev, 2017[34]). Nonetheless, a lack of CSR can result in adverse media attention, ethical issues, and financial penalties (Boma-Siaminabo, 2022)[35], negatively impacting a company's reputation, financial standing, and overall value.

Corporate social performance dimension

The case for corporate social performance (CSP) highlights the importance of balancing social, economic, and environmental concerns in business operations. This emphasis on corporate social responsibility (CSR) has positively affected brand perceptions and customer attitudes towards sustainable businesses (Agyei et al., 2022[16]; Allui & Pinto, 2022[6]; Le, 2022[36]).

Engaging with stakeholders and meeting their expectations is crucial for sustainable development and gaining a competitive advantage. Customer loyalty-driven CSR and corporate responsibility initiatives (CRI) can promote community investment (Ajina et al., 2019)[11]. Scholars such as Carroll and Laasch (2020)[33] and Laasch & Conaway (2016)[37] argue that these initiatives rely on businesses' ability to identify and capitalise on value-added innovations.

Sustainable competitive advantage (SCA) is seen as essential for long-term business success, according to several researchers (Mataruka et al., 2023[38]; Asri, 2021[39]; Soebroto & Budiyanto, 2021[40]; Ambrosini & Altintas, 2019[41]). CSP

involves building lasting emotional connections with customers and stakeholders, which can be achieved through innovation and addressing stakeholder concerns (Agyei et al., 2022[16]; Wickert, 2021[10]; Russo, 2016[19]).

Corporate social performance (CSP) refers to the extent to which a corporation meets its social responsibilities and contributes to the well-being of society. Thus, CSP encampuses customer loyalty, reputation, satisfaction, and trust. Customer loyalty refers to the tendency of customers to consistently choose and support a particular brand or company above its competitors. The involvement of our firm in social activities has demonstrated a positive impact on client retention, as evidenced by studies conducted by Le (2022)[36], Islam et al. (2021)[42], and Devie et al. (2020)[43]. Customer reputation refers to the perception and evaluation of a company or brand by its customers. It encompasses the overall impression, and the prioritisation of consumer rights is a key focus within our company's management strategy, as evidenced by the works of Le (2022)[36], Islam et al. (2021)[42], Devie et al. (2020)[43], and Fombrun et al. (2000)[44].

Providing unambiguous and accurate information on product labels regarding our warranty duties is imperative. Several investigations (Le, 2022[36]; Islam et al., 2021[42]; Devie et al., 2020[43]) have validated this practice.

Hypotheses development

Corporate social responsibility and corporate social performance

The existing literature and research indicate a lack of agreement on the relationship between corporate social responsibility (CSR) and business performance. Research suggests corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives can yield favourable business outcomes. These include enhanced customer loyalty, improved financial stability, increased corporate legitimacy, and enhanced stakeholder value. Scholars Zhang and Yi (2022)[45] and Carroll and Shabana (2010)[46] assert that CSR can improve a company's reputation, attract customers, and create value for stakeholders. Others suggest that CSR can enhance business performance by influencing customer loyalty and positive word-of-mouth communication (Islam et al., 2021[42]; Amsami et al., 2020[47]; Chen McCain et al., 2019{27]; Park & Kim, 2018[12]). Loyalty from customers who perceive a company as socially responsible can result in increased customer satisfaction and trust, leading to financial stability, increased profitability, and a competitive advantage over rivals (Islam et al., 2021[42]; Chen McCain et al., 2019[31]; Russo, 2016[19]).

The stakeholder value creation view supports the idea that CSR can positively influence business performance. This theory considers stakeholder rights, interests, and needs to help the organisation act socially responsibly (Gadenne et al., 2012)[48]. By effectively managing relationships with stakeholders, companies can create success and value.

However, opposing perspectives argue that the connection between CSR and business performance remains uncertain. Some studies have found no statistically significant correlation between CSR and firm performance. However, other studies argue that dynamic business environments can influence this correlation and the implementation of standardised practices (Carroll, 1991)[5]. The existing research primarily examines developed contexts and may not directly apply to developing nations (Kvasničková Stanislavská et al., 2020[49]; Carroll & Shabana, 2010[46]).

Further, some studies have found mixed results regarding the link between CSR and business performance. Some researchers have reported no significant relationship between CSR and firm performance (Reverte et al., 2016[50]; McWilliams & Siegel, 2000[51]). These inconsistencies may be due to the dynamic nature of the business landscape and the varying levels of importance placed on CSR across different contexts (Qu, 2009)[52].

Considering the broader perspective and the long-term benefits of CSR is essential. Prioritising CSR can enhance a company's reputation, customer satisfaction, and trust, ultimately leading to financial stability and increased profitability. However, the relationship between CSR and business performance is complex and influenced by customer loyalty, stakeholder value creation, and the specific business environment. Thus, the optimal mix of these elements remains unknown within the domain of social business enterprises.

Further research is needed to understand this relationship better divergent and contrary revelation from their impact on competitiveness, particularly in different contexts and industries. The proposed hypothesis of the study is that Zimbabwe's service-based industry enterprises adopt a positive relationship between CSR and business performance as a whole entity.

Hence, the sub-hypotheses (H_1, H_2, H_3, and H_4) are the suggestion and the discussion of the four components of CSR and their respective corporate social performance elements in the following section. The following paragraphs review the four types of CSR (economic, ethical, environmental and philanthropical) concerning sustainable competitiveness.

Economic Responsibilities of CSR and Corporate Social Performance

Economic Corporate Responsibility (ECR) is one of the four types of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) businesses can use to give back to the community. It serves as the rationale for the business case, as it encompasses a company's efforts to achieve its profit objectives (Kaplan & McMillan, 2020)[17]. ECR initiatives can align with various CSR commitments. These include investing in local communities, creating job opportunities, supporting local businesses, implementing production initiatives to reduce carbon footprint, and conserving natural resources (Zhong et al., 2022[53]; Randrianasolo & Semenov, 2022[7]; Carroll & Shabana, 2010[46]).

Businesses pursue their financial objectives through investment decisions, and ECR can be advantageous for financial stability and customer loyalty (Le, 2022[36]; Islam et al., 2021[42]; Wickert, 2021[10]; Devie et al., 2020[43]; Carroll & Shabana, 2010[46]). Managers strategically engage in CSR to reduce risks and avoid accountability for adverse consequences (McCarthy et al., 2017)[54].

The case for ECR has generated debate among researchers and stakeholders. While some studies show a positive impact of ECR on service level quality, others disagree (Aboud & Yang, 2022[26]; Chen McCain et al., 2019[31]; Park & Kim, 2018[12]; Carroll & Shabana, 2010[46]). The relationship between ECR and service level quality remains questionable and requires further investigation (Kim et al., 2017[55]; Chen McCain et al., 2018[31]).

Implementing CSR initiatives, including ECR, can create shareholder value by advocating for various stakeholders'

interests (Gul et al., 2020)[56]. Previous research has consistently shown a positive relationship between CSR and organisational performance (Fatemi & Dube, 2021[57]; Fatemi et al., 2018[58]; Fatemi et al., 2015[59]). However, Bhandari and Bhuyan (2022)[60] suggest that CSR engagement may lead to reduced efficiency in capital allocation.

Thus, this study considers ECR aims to achieve three key objectives: financial profits (FPRO), employment creation (ECT), and economic investment (EIV). FPRO prioritises attaining profit objectives, whereas ECT emphasises generating employment opportunities within communities. EIV entails the provision of superior products and services to customers. Various studies (Asiaei et al., 2023[20]; Islam et al., 2021[42]; Kaplan & McMillan, 2020[17]) support these objectives. Therefore, ECR is a type of CSR that businesses can use to achieve their profit objectives while giving back to the community. It involves various initiatives to support local communities, reduce environmental impact, and make investment decisions. The effect of ECR on service level quality and its relationship with financial stability and customer loyalty are subjects of debate.

Hence, the following hypothesis states:

- H_1: Zimbabwe's service-based enterprises' industry enterprises adopt a positive relationship between the economic responsibilities of CSR and corporate social performance.

Ethical Responsibilities of CSR and Corporate Social Performance

Ethical responsibility (ETR) refers to a business organisation's commitment to conducting its operations in a principled manner, adhering to accepted practices and human rights guidelines (Uslu & engün, 2021[29]; Wong & Dhanesh, 2017[30]). It involves fair treatment of all stakeholders and upholding ethical concepts and values within a specific industry or context (Abdelmoety et al., 2022[61]; Al-Abdallah & Ahmed, 2018[13]).

Different scholars have defined ETR in various ways. Some view it as businesses' observance of moral etiquette in all their operations (Wickert, 2021[10]; Russo, 2016[19]). Others emphasise the importance of companies ensuring that their products' materials, labour, and components meet acceptable standards, such as avoiding child labour and ethical violations (Belas et al., 2022[62]).

ETR applies to all business and society stakeholders, including employers, suppliers, employees, investors, government, and customers (Aboud & Yang, 2022[26]). It encompasses trust, trustworthiness, and cooperativeness (Asiaei et al., 2021) [[21].

Businesses use ETR to build their ethical brand identity by supporting corporate social responsibility (CSR) projects that align with their beliefs (Wong & Dhanesh, 2017)[30]. They aim to demonstrate that their CSR activities are significant, impactful, and aligned with their principles, appealing to socially and ecologically conscious consumers (Belas et al., 2022)[62].

There is a growing demand among customers for environmentally friendly products. Society expects corporations to contribute to their communities, and the government expects them to avoid environmental degradation and illegal

practices (Aboud & Yang, 2022[26]; Wickert, 2021[10]; Martnez & Rodrguez del Bosque, 2013[63]). The literature suggests that corporate legitimacy and stakeholder value creation are the primary focus areas for organisations considering the adoption of CSR. This study examines the inclusion of social issues such as human rights and fair labour practises within the concept of ETR. Discrimination is absent, and all employees enjoy equal opportunities. Asiaei et al. (2023)[20] and Islam et al. (2021)[42] have researched human resource policies that promote the balance between employees' work and personal lives. These policies may prevent illegal commercial practices (ICP) by encouraging employees to follow best practices. Therefore, the following hypothesis states:

- H_2: Zimbabwe's service-based enterprises' industry enterprises adopt a positive relationship between the ethical responsibilities of CSR and corporate social performance as a whole entity.

Environmental Responsibilities of CSR and Sustainable Performance

The literature indicates that businesses must adopt environmental responsibility (ENR) to gain green legitimacy and fulfil regulatory stakeholder demands (Baah et al., 2021[64]; Lee & Raschke, 2021[65]). Environmental responsibilities (ENR) management focuses on maintaining a sustainable and eco-friendly environment by adopting practices that minimise pollution and promote the sustainable use of natural resources (Abbas & Dogan, 2022[66]; Cosma et al., 2022[25]). This approach is in line with the environmental stewardship promoted by environmentalists (Abbas & Dogan, 2022[66]; Lee & Raschke, 2021[65]).

Businesses should implement measures to reduce pollution in production processes, greenhouse gas emissions, single-use plastic consumption, water consumption, and communal waste (Baah et al., 2021[64]). Companies can support renewable energy, sustainable resources, and recyclable materials by conducting ENR assessments. This approach can lead to a reduction in waste disposal. Chaung and Huang (2018)[67] discovered that companies prioritising environmental and natural resources also tend to implement green management practices.

Engaging in ENR practises can yield significant advantages for companies. The notion of ENR encompasses mitigating pollution (ROP) and compliance with regulations related to occupational hazards, health, safety, and hygiene practices. Research conducted by Asiaei et al. (2023)[20] and Islam et al. (2021)[42] has demonstrated that the adoption of recyclable materials (RWD) initiatives has a positive impact on reducing greenhouse gas emissions and waste production while also facilitating the recycling of materials. This strategy encompasses the improvement of their standing and economic benefits, particularly in cases when the expenses associated with emissions reduction are comparatively minimal (Aboud & Yang, 2022[26]; Baah et al., 2021[64]). The existing body of literature indicates that organisations contemplating the implementation of CSR prioritise corporate legitimacy and the generation of stakeholder value.

Hence, the following hypothesis states:

- H_3: Zimbabwe's service-based enterprises' industry enterprises adopt a positive relationship between the environmental responsibilities of CSR and corporate social performance.

Philanthropic Responsibilities of CSR and corporate social performance

Philanthropic responsibility (PHR) is an essential aspect of corporate social responsibility (CSR) that involves business organisations making efforts to improve the welfare of the community and society (Amsami et al., 2020)[47]. This involvement typically includes providing financial assistance to charitable or non-profit organisations, either directly or through the establishment of charity organisations (Allui & Pinto, 2022[6]).

Numerous studies have shown that businesses allocate a significant portion of their CSR initiatives to charitable donations (Zhong et al., 2022[53]; Randrianasolo & Semenov, 2022[7]). The implementation of PHR can be conditional or unconditional, depending on the desired outcomes a business aims to achieve in exchange for donations.

Furthermore, the implementation of philanthropy is a discretionary activity carried out by managers. Responsible business management involves effectively managing social, economic, and environmental capital and impact across various activities and functions. It aims to achieve corporate social performance, which goes beyond charity and includes improving sustainable competitiveness and cultivating positive attitudes towards a business's brand or products among critical stakeholders (Zhong et al., 2022[53]; Elkington & van Dijk, 2017[4]; Carroll & Shabana, 2010[46]).

Philanthropic responsibility (PHR) refers to the voluntary efforts undertaken by individuals or organisations to enhance social assets. These efforts typically involve active participation in various social projects to benefit the community, such as sponsorships and charitable initiatives (Asiaei et al., 2023[20]; Islam et al., 2021[42]; Rust et al., 2002[68]; Zeithaml, 1988[69]). The Financial Assistance Donations (FAD) Fund supports programmes aimed at safeguarding and enhancing the natural environment, as documented by Asiaei et al. (2023)[20] and Islam et al. (2021)[42]. The study conducted by Asiaei et al. (2023)[20] and Islam et al. (2021)[42] highlights the significance of indirect affiliation with social enterprises (IAB) in cultivating commercial ties with suppliers within the same region. In Zimbabwe, service-based enterprises may exhibit a positive relationship between philanthropic obligations and the overall legitimacy of their corporate presence within the community. The literature points to corporate legitimacy as the potential main focus for ETR to CSR adoption.

Therefore, the subsequent hypothesis is as follows:

- H_4: Zimbabwe's service-based industry enterprises adopt a positive relationship between philanthropic responsibilities of CSR and (CSP) corporate social performance.

ECR, ETR, and ENR components of CSR and PHR

The literature indicates a growing consensus that philanthropic responsibility is not solely an act of goodwill but rather a duty and commitment of business organisations(Achmad, 2022[70]]; Randrianasolo & Semenov, 2022[7]; Zhong et al., 2022[53]). The perception of this responsibility is rooted in the desire to prevent stagnation and ensure companies' continued prosperity and growth (Kaplan & McMillan, 2020[17]; Eveland et al., 2018[18]). Based on the argument that CSR is more charitable. Therefore, the following set of three hypothesis statements:

- H_5: Zimbabwe's service-based industry enterprises adopt a positive relationship between the ECR and PHR.

- H_6: Zimbabwe's service-based industry enterprises adopt a positive relationship between ETR and PHR.
- H_7: Zimbabwe's service-based industry enterprises adopt a positive relationship between ENR and PHR.

Based on the literature review, we opine that PHR mediates between CSR (ECR, ETR, ENR) factors and CSP.

Thus, the following three mediating hypothesis statements:

- H_8: Zimbabwe's service-based industry enterprises adopt a positive mediating of the PHR relationship between the ECR and CSP.
- H_9: Zimbabwe's service-based industry enterprises adopt a positive mediating of the PHR relationship between the ETR and CSP.
- H_{10}: Zimbabwe's service-based industry enterprises adopt a positive relationship mediating the PHR relationship between the ENR and CSP.

Figure 1 depicts the conceptual framework illustrating the relationship between corporate social responsibility (CSR) and corporate social performance (CSP). CSP encompasses customer loyalty indicators such as customer reputation (CR), customer satisfaction (CS), and customer trust (CT) factors (Le, 2022[36]; Islam et al., 2021[42]; Devie et al., 2020[43]).

Figure 1. Research Test Model
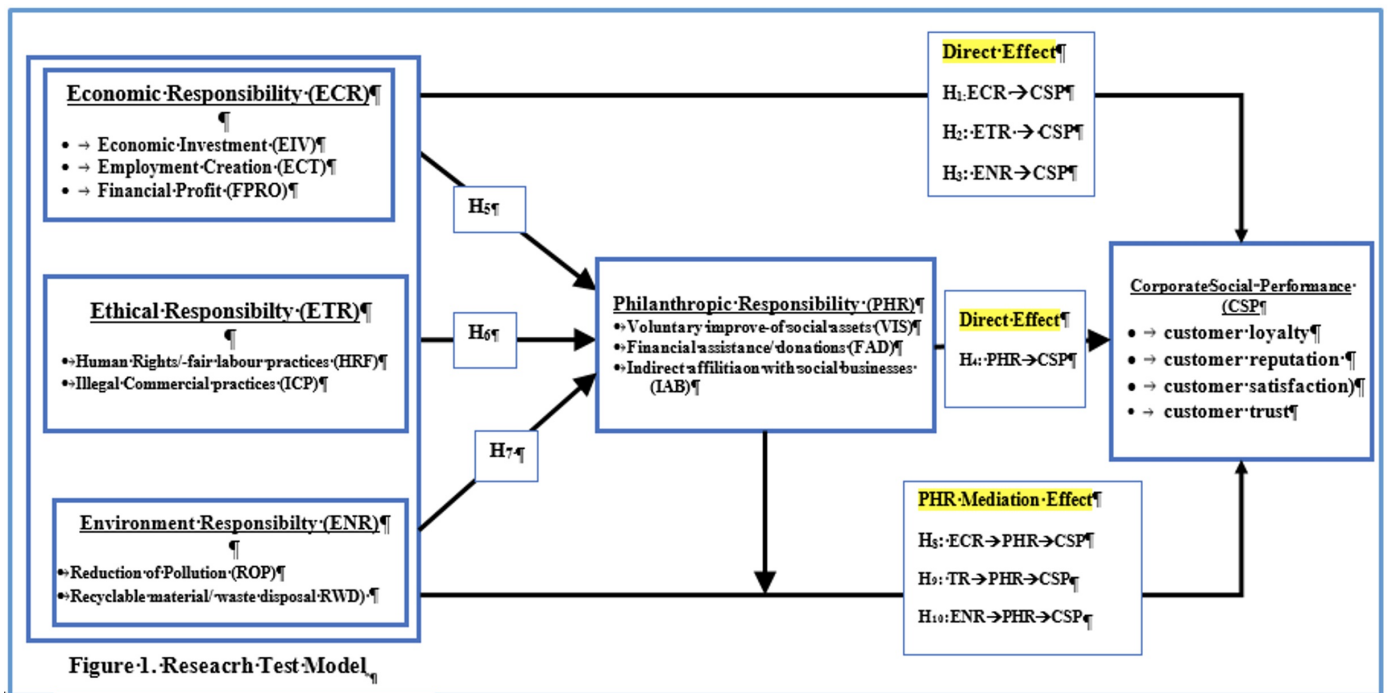
Research materials and methods

Managers of service-based enterprises were surveyed cross-sectionally as part of the research approach for this study. The theoretical foundation of this study is a framework that integrates multiple perspectives, including responsible management theories such as the triple-bottom-line (TBL) or integrated reporting, stakeholder (ST), and legitimacy (LT)

approaches. This study uses a comprehensive approach to assess corporate social responsibility (CSR) dimensions and corporate social performance (CRP) measures. The CRP elements derive from the Kaplan and Norton balanced scorecard (BSC) and the Triple Bottom Line philosophy (TBL).

The sampling frame purposively selected individuals from service-based businesses that had already integrated corporate social operations (Sharma et al., 2020[71]). Within this frame, companies' strata of the services further inferred the systematic random selection. This approach aimed to overcome the limitations of cross-sectional data by focusing on businesses already involved in their communities within strata-specific activities. The study specifically targeted managers of companies who held managerial positions, as they were considered critical decision-makers in corporate social responsibility (Yaseen et al., 2022[72]). Accordingly, in this study, the industry's players in Zimbabwe's service-based enterprises were better equipped to supply the required information. All potential participants in the survey were made aware of the study's goals and assured that their responses would remain confidential (Memon et al., 2023[73]).

The data collection instrument development went through several pre-administration steps. After designing the survey questionnaire, we examined the face and content validity of the scale items by using a sample of two (2) academic faculty members and three (3) business managers. A pilot test was conducted with a sample size of 30 participants to ensure the study's validity. The researchers administered the survey instrument in English, consistent with the respondents' level of standard education medium of learning in Zimbabwe. Henri and Journeault (2010)[74] assert this is a common practice in management control. The study included control variables such as gender, income, and education, based on previous research.

The researchers compared early and late respondents who returned within the first month of the fieldwork and found no significant differences in their answers. Thus, addressing the non-response bias. This step helped ensure that the data collected was representative of the target population. This finding is further supported, therefore enhancing its validity. The data collection process lasted approximately three months, during which the selected participants completed 650 questionnaires.

The study employed Partial Least Squares (PLS) Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to examine the proposed hypotheses. The authors used PLS-SEM to purify, analyse, and present the data. The statistical technique explored the connections between CSR and CSP.

Measures

This study employs a multifaceted approach to evaluate corporate social responsibility (CSR). It integrates the Kaplan and Norton balanced scorecard dimensions and the Triple Bottom Line philosophy for the performance measures. We use a composite index of nonfinancial and financial metrics to assess corporate social performance (CSP). These measures include shareholder value creation, business legitimacy, and customer loyalty. This investigation is informed by a comprehensive questionnaire with 70 measurement items modified from earlier research (Asiaei et al., 2023[20]; Islam et al., 2021[42]; Luo et al., 2017; Reverte et al., 2016[50]).

Due to the difficulty in acquiring reliable CSR data, the questionnaire evaluates the impressions of respondents rather than objective metrics (Woodcock et al., 1994[75]; Bagozzi & Yi, 1988[76]). Authentic perception-based reactions are consistent with measurable outcomes (Ainin et al., 2015[77]). We evaluate the inquiries using a five-point Likert scale that ranges from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree."Nunnally (1978)[78] stated that a minimum of three items is required to establish reliability for each construct. Asiaei and Jusoh (2017)[79] employed a conventional tool to examine managers' performance. The advantages of value-creation components may vary among industries. The study's questionnaire themes are listed in Table 1 below and are in Appendix A.

Table 1. Constructs, Measurements, Descriptions, and References

Constructs	Measurements	Description	References
Economic responsibility (ECR)	Financial profits (FPRO) 7-items	Encompasses a company's efforts to achieve its profit objectives.	Islam et al., 2021[42]; Kaplan & McMillan, 2020[17]; Brown & Dacin, 1997[80].
	Employment creation (ECT) 4-items	Refers to the commitment to job creation in the communities.	Asiaei et al., 2023[20]; Islam et al., 2021[42]; Kaplan & McMillan, 2020[17]; Brown & Dacin, 1997[80].
	Economic investment (EIV) 7-items	Refers to concerns about offering our customers high-quality products and services.	Asiaei et al., 2023[20]; Islam et al., 2021[42]; Kaplan & McMillan, 2020[17]; Brown & Dacin, 1997[80].
Ethical responsibility (ETR)	Social issues of human rights/ fair labor practices (HRF) 5-items	Equal opportunities exist for all employees without any discrimination.	Asiaei et al., 2023[20]; Islam et al., 2021[42]; Brown & Dacin, 1997[80].
	Illegal commercial practices (ICP) 7-items	Human resource policies aimed at facilitating the conciliation of employees' professional and personal lives.	Asiaei et al., 2023[20]; Islam et al., 2021[42]
Environmental responsibility (ENR)	Reduction of pollution (ROP) 11 items	We comply with standards related to labour risks, health, safety, and hygiene programmes.	Asiaei et al., 2023[20]; Islam et al., 2021[42]
	Recyclable materials (RWD) 4-items	Initiatives of reductions in gas emissions and waste production and in favour of recycling materials.	Asiaei et al., 2023[20]; Islam et al., 2021[42]
Philanthropical responsibility (PHR)	Voluntary improvement of social assets (VIS) 5-items	We participate in social projects for the community (sponsorships, charities, etc.).	Asiaei et al., 2023[20]; Islam et al., 2021[42]; Rust et al., 2002[68] & Zeithaml, 1988[69]
	Financial assistance donations (FAD) 7-items	Fund initiatives in activities related to protecting and improving our natural environment.	Asiaei et al., 2023[20]; Islam et al., 2021[42]
	Indirect affiliation with social businesses (IAB) 6-items.	Fostering business relationships with suppliers of our same region.	Asiaei et al., 2023[20]; Islam et al., 2021[42]
Corporate social performance (CSP) 7-items	Customer loyalty	Participation by our business in social has improved client retention.	Le, 2022[36]; Islam et al., 2021[42]; Devie et al., 2020[43]
	Customer Reputation	Respect for consumer rights is a management priority for our company.	Le, 2022[36]; Islam et al., 2021[42]; Devie et al., 2020[43]; Fombrun et al., 2000[44]
	Customer satisfaction/ trust	We offer clear and precise information in labelling our products related to our warranty obligations.	Le, 2022[36]; Islam et al., 2021[42]; Devie et al., 2020[43].

Sampling and data collection

The small and medium business organisations (SBMA) directory on the Harare LinkedIn page served as the basis for choosing the study's sample. This directory provides a comprehensive list of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)

operating in the Harare province, which comprises three districts. ZIMSTATS (2023)[81] states that SMEs comprise 95% of private businesses, indicating a diverse broad-base sampling frame.

The researchers informed potential respondents and clarified the purpose of the research through email, WhatsApp, and telephone. The survey package included a cover letter in the questionnaires to clearly state the study's purpose and emphasise the importance of senior managers' participation. The researchers maintained the confidentiality of responses throughout the research process. Respondents had the option to receive a summary of the survey feedback results. Reminder emails and phone calls to ensure a satisfactory response rate during the data collection.

The survey software tool Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com) conducted the survey and received 683 questionnaires. We excluded 33 entries with more than 5% missing data and ended up with 650 usable and completed questionnaires. The effective response rate from the initially administered questionnaire 1,050 is 62%. Researchers often use online surveys in contemporary research because they are fast, simple, and cost-effective (Mataruka et al., 2023[38]; Mataruka, 2022[82]; Manfreda et al., 2008[83]). In addition, this method reduces the time required for data collection (Dutot & Bergeron, 2016)[84]. Dillman (2006)[85] recommends offering instructions to assist.

Results

Descriptive demographic information

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of the participant's demographic information: age, gender, position and experience.

Table 2. Demographic data: age and gender of all the participants

	Frequency (N=109)	Percentage (%)
Age		
<25 years	1	.2
25-35 years	93	14.3
36-45 years	203	31.2
46-55 years	205	31.5
> 55 years	148	22.8
Gender		
Female	149	22.9
Male	501	77.1

The descriptive information for the 650 respondents shows the age group with the highest representation were individuals aged 36-45 years and 46-55 years, closely followed by those aged 36-45. In contrast, individuals below 25 years and above 55 years were relatively fewer in number. 75% of respondents were men; most were owners, executives, and managers. This demographic profile suggests that decision-makers tend to be younger and better educated. They may also be more aware of business developments in sustainability matters and beyond.

The findings show a gender gap, with females making up 22.9%. This spread suggests a higher percentage of males and an acceptable gender mix reflective of the presence of males in senior positions (ZIMStats, 2023)[81]. As a result, women tend to have a stronger sense of social duty than men, and their voice validates the results as unbiased.

Table 3. Demographic data: Position, Education and Experience of all the participants

	Frequency (N=109)	Percentage (%)
Position		
CFO Manager	239	36.8
Senior Manager	292	44.9
Executive	119	18.3
Education		
Advanced secondary school level	31	4.8
Diploma/professional skilled artisans	114	17.5
Undergraduate Degree	257	39.5
Masters	191	29.4
PhD	24	3.7
Other	33	5.1
Experience		
Less than one year	37	5.7
1-5 years	252	38.8
6-10 years	188	28.9
11-15 years	92	14.2
Above 15 years	81	12.5

Orgainsational positions comprised chief financial officers (CFOs)(36.8%), senior operational managers in critical departments (44.9%), and other executive officers (18.3%). This is unsurprising given the usual demographics of company owners and managers in Zimbabwe, especially the Harare District. Senior managers (44.9%) make up the majority of the positions, followed by corporate services managers (36.8%) and executive functions (18.3%).

Table 3 above, regarding educational qualifications, the largest segment comprises undergraduate degree individuals, representing 39.5 percent of the population. The second-largest group includes individuals with a Master's degree,

followed by diploma/professional skilled artisans holders representing 29.4 and 17.5 percent of the target population. Other qualifications, Advanced secondary school level, PhD and other unspecified, represent 4.8 percent, 3.7 percent and 5.1 percent of the sample, respectively.

Further, work experience above five years in their positions was 55.6%. Collectively making fifty-six years of experience in the companies. Again, 55.6% of the managerial level of six years or higher shows that decision-makers in corporate settings who are aware of concerns related to responsible management are informed about their organisations' social business initiatives, historical patterns and expected trends. This observation implies that concerning the UN Sustainable Development Goals Agenda 2030, the respondents might be more informed about corporate changes in their sector and elsewhere.

Table 4. Profile of respondents by sector and experience

	Frequency (N=109)	Percentage (%)
Sector		
Health	58	8.9
Information Technology	85	13.1
Professional services	75	11.5
Retail and Wholesale	203	31.2
Tourism and Leisure	66	10.2
Financial Services	163	25.1
Experience		
Less than one year	37	5.7
1-5 years	252	38.8
6-10 years	188	28.9
11-15 years	92	14.2
Above 15 years	81	12.5

Table 4 above shows that Retail and wholesale comprise most of the six sectors, accounting for 31.2%. The second-largest sector is financial services, which accounts for 25.1% of the industry; information technology is the third-largest sector, with 13.2% of the total. With 11.5%, 10.2%, and 8.9%, respectively, professional services, tourism and leisure, and health are close behind.

Measurement model

Table 5 below presents the mean and standard deviation values for variable financial profit "FPRO," which provide insights into the responses' central tendency and dispersion, highlighting the data's average and variability.

Table 5. Financial profit

	Mean	Std. Deviation
FPRO1	2.960	1.165
FPRO2	3.228	1.112
FPRO3	3.215	1.181
FPRO4	3.366	1.192
FPRO5	3.320	1.153
FPRO6	3.203	1.173

The data analysis reveals that the variables have relatively consistent mean values between 2.960 and 3.366, indicating similar average levels of responses, accompanied by a narrow range of standard deviation values from 1.112 to 1.181, suggesting a low degree of variability or dispersion in how participants responded.

Table 6 below presents the mean and standard deviation values for variables relating to employment creation "ECT," which provide insights into the responses' central tendency and dispersion, highlighting the data's average and variability.

Table 6. Employment creation in the communities

	Mean	Std. Deviation
ECT1	3.051	1.151
ECT2	2.888	1.233
ECT3	3.186	1.181
ECT4	3.400	1.219

The data analysis reveals that the variables have relatively consistent mean values between 2.888 and 3.400, indicating similar average levels of responses, accompanied by a narrow range of standard deviation values from 1.151 to 1.233, suggesting a low degree of variability or dispersion in how participants responded.

Table 7 below presents the mean and standard deviation values for variables relating to economic investment "EIV," which provide insights into the responses' central tendency and dispersion, highlighting the data's average and variability.

Table 7. Economic investment voluntary

	Mean	Std. Deviation
EIV1	3.040	1.166
EIV3	3.055	1.224
EIV4	3.051	1.184
EIV5	3.143	1.194
EIV6	3.028	1.206
EIV7	2.786	1.254

The data analysis reveals that the variables have relatively consistent mean values between 2.786 and 3.143, indicating similar average levels of responses, accompanied by a narrow range of standard deviation values from 1.166 to 1.254, suggesting a low degree of variability or dispersion in how participants responded.

Table 8 below presents the mean and standard deviation values for the variable human rights issues, such as evidence of child labour/ enslavement "HRF," which provide insights into the responses' central tendency and dispersion, highlighting the data's average and variability.

Table 8. Human rights issues evidence

	Mean	Std. Deviation
HRF1	3.414	1.190
HRF2	2.975	1.234
HRF3	3.158	1.249
HRF4	2.925	1.231
HRF5	3.131	1.180
HRF6	2.955	1.188
HRF7	3.117	1.133

The data analysis reveals that the variables have relatively consistent mean values between 2.925 and 3.414, indicating similar average levels of responses, accompanied by a narrow range of standard deviation values from 1.133 to 1.249, suggesting a low degree of variability or dispersion in how participants responded.

Table 9 below presents the mean and standard deviation values for the variable relating to illegal commercial practices, "ICP," which provide insights into the responses' central tendency and dispersion, highlighting the data's average and variability.

Table 9. Illegal Commercial Practices

	Mean	Std. Deviation
ICP2	2.945	1.201
ICP5	2.986	1.189
ICP6	2.863	1.203
ICP7	2.863	1.210

The data analysis reveals that the variables have relatively consistent mean values between 2.863 and 2.986, indicating similar average levels of responses, accompanied by a narrow range of standard deviation values from 1.189 to 1.210, suggesting a relatively low degree of variability or dispersion in how participants responded.

Table 10 below presents the mean and standard deviation values for the variable relating to the reduction of pollution "ROP," which provide insights into the responses' central tendency and dispersion, highlighting the data's average and variability.

Table 10. Reduction of pollution

	Mean	Std. Deviation
ROP7	2.862	1.118
ROP8	2.820	1.134
ROP9	2.829	1.139
ROP10	2.738	1.017
ROP11	2.763	1.034

The data analysis reveals that the variables have relatively consistent mean values between 2.738 and 2.862, indicating similar average levels of responses, accompanied by a narrow range of standard deviation values from 1.017 to 1.139, suggesting a low degree of variability or dispersion in how participants responded.

Table 11 below presents the mean and standard deviation values for variables relating to reducing waste disposal "RWD," which provide insights into the responses' central tendency and dispersion, highlighting the data's average and variability.

Table 11. Reducing waste disposal

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
RWD1	983	2.743	1.127
RWD2	983	2.697	1.103
RWD3	983	2.798	1.102
RWD4	983	2.789	1.119

The data analysis reveals that the variables have relatively consistent mean values between 2.697 and 2.798, indicating similar average levels of responses, accompanied by a narrow range of standard deviation values from 1.102 to 1.127, suggesting a low degree of variability or dispersion in how participants responded.

Table 12 below presents the mean and standard deviation values for the variable related to voluntary improving social equity in their serviced communities, "VIS," which provides insights into the responses' central tendency and dispersion, highlighting the data's average and variability.

Table 12. Voluntary improving social equity in their serviced communities		
	Mean	**Std. Deviation**
VIS1	3.083	1.213
VIS2	3.111	1.250
VIS3	3.100	1.196
VIS4	2.997	1.230
VIS5	3.011	1.232

The data analysis reveals that the variables have relatively consistent mean values between 2.997 and 3.111, indicating similar average levels of responses, accompanied by a narrow range of standard deviation values from 1.196 to 1.250, suggesting a low degree of variability or dispersion in how participants responded.

Table 13 below presents the mean and standard deviation values for the financial assistance donations "FAD" variable. These provide insights into the responses' central tendency and dispersion, highlighting the data's average and variability.

Table 13. Financial assistance donations		
	Mean	**Std. Deviation**
FAD1	2.937	1.141
FAD3	2.929	1.210
FAD4	2.998	1.152
FAD5	2.805	1.236
FAD6	2.862	1.192
FAD7	2.838	1.204

The data analysis reveals that the variables have relatively consistent mean values between 2.805 and 2.937, indicating similar average levels of responses, accompanied by a narrow range of standard deviation values from 1.141 to 1.236, suggesting a low degree of variability or dispersion in how participants responded.

Table 14 below presents the mean and standard deviation values for the variable relating to indirect affiliation with business activities, "IAB," which provide insights into the responses' central tendency and dispersion, highlighting the data's average and variability.

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Table 14. Indirect affiliation with business activities		
IAB1	3.069	1.172
IAB2	3.028	1.159
IAB3	3.134	1.175
IAB4	3.232	1.175
IAB5	2.995	1.185
IAB7	2.978	1.167

The data analysis reveals that the variables have relatively consistent mean values between 2.955 and 3.232, indicating similar average levels of responses, accompanied by a narrow range of standard deviation values from 1.159 to 1.185, suggesting a low degree of variability or dispersion in how participants responded.

Table 15 below presents the mean and standard deviation values for the variable relating to corporate social performance "CSP," which provide insights into the responses' central tendency and dispersion, highlighting the data's average and variability.

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Table 15. Corporate Social Performance		
CSP1	2.563	1.053
CSP2	2.642	1.008
CSP3	2.711	1.023
CSP5	2.648	1.104
CSP7	2.703	1.088

The data analysis reveals that the variables have relatively consistent mean values between 2.563 and 2.703, indicating similar average levels of responses, accompanied by a narrow range of standard deviation values from 1.008 to 1.088,

suggesting a low degree of variability or dispersion in how participants responded.

Data purification

Before data processing, several measuring tools must be improved and tested for accuracy (Churchill Jr., 1979[86]; Gerbing & Anderson, 1988[87]). Utilising previously established scale creation and purification methodologies and techniques (King et al., 2012[88]; Slavec & Drnovšek, 2012[89]), specifically exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), the scale items were all filtered and purified.

SmartPLS 4.0 assesses each question's internal consistency and convergent validity. The internal consistency reliability assessment used composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha (CA). The evaluation of convergent validity involved using factor or outer loadings and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Cronbach's alpha is a statistical tool that can analyse the degree to which numerous indications are internally consistent. Hair et al. (2013)[90] found that the composite dependability value exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.70. The average variance extracted (AVE) exceeded 0.50, indicating a robust convergent validity. Table 16 provides a concise summary of the principal findings derived from the study and presents a comprehensive exposition of the results (Hair et al.,2013)[90].

Table 16. Descriptive statistics

Variable	CA	CR	AVE
VIS	0.835	0.883	0.603
CSP	0.774	0.847	0.525
IAB	0.826	0.874	0.537
ROP	0.774	0.841	0.518
RWD	0.701	0.817	0.528
ICP	0.821	0.882	0.651
FPRO	0.835	0.879	0.547
EIV	0.877	0.907	0.619
FAD	0.868	0.901	0.604
HRF	0.858	0.892	0.545
ECT	0.747	0.840	0.570

Table 16 displays the AVE values ranging from 0.518 to 0.651, indicating that the measurement constructs possess convergent validity, surpassing the recommended threshold of 0.5. The CR values, ranging from 0.817 to 0.907, meet the suggested threshold of 0.7, indicating good internal consistency of the measurement constructs. Furthermore, the CA values, ranging from 0.701 to 0.877, reinforce the presence of internal consistency within the measurement items. To improve the validity and reliability of the measurement model, 14 items with factor loadings below 0.5 were eliminated from the analysis.

Table 17 presents the outcomes of the Fornell-Larcker criterion, a commonly used technique for evaluating the discriminant validity of measurement models. Table 2 demonstrates that all the constructs also fulfilled the Fornell-Larcker criterion for discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981)[91]. These findings provide insights into the measurement constructs' distinctiveness and ability to capture unique aspects of the latent variables.

Table 17. Fornell-Larcker criterion results

	VIS	CSP	IAB	ROP	RWD	ICP	FPRO	EIV	FAD	HRF	ECT
VIS	**0.776**										
CSP	0.201	**0.725**									
IAB	0.713	0.295	**0.733**								
ROP	0.199	0.495	0.269	**0.720**							
RWD	0.233	0.501	0.312	0.488	**0.726**						
ICP	0.673	0.090	0.654	0.122	0.138	**0.807**					
FPRO	0.649	0.146	0.620	0.248	0.231	0.596	**0.740**				
EIV	0.657	0.069	0.679	0.129	0.114	0.669	0.581	**0.787**			
FAD	0.631	0.113	0.698	0.163	0.149	0.66	0.586	0.723	**0.777**		
HRF	0.763	0.153	0.707	0.23	0.228	0.676	0.692	0.636	0.661	**0.738**	
ECT	0.691	0.097	0.657	0.177	0.148	0.684	0.655	0.686	0.661	0.682	**0.755**

Note: The number in bold is the square root of AVE.

The Fornell-Larcker criterion reveals discriminant validity among all the measurement items, as indicated by the higher square root values of each factor's Average Variance Extracted (AVE) on the diagonal compared to the correlation coefficients. This confirms that each element is more strongly associated with its indicators than with the indicators of other factors, validating the distinctiveness of the measurement constructs.

Additionally, to further evaluate the discriminant validity of the measurement models, the study employed the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT) technique. Table 18 presents the results of this analysis, providing additional insights into the distinctiveness of the measurement constructs.

Table 18. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT) results

	VIS	CSP	IAB	ROP	RWD	ICP	FPRO	EIV	FAD	HRF	ECT
VIS											
CSP	0.246										
IAB	0.857	0.367									
ROP	0.261	0.657	0.355								
RWD	0.303	0.679	0.410	0.697							
ICP	0.814	0.121	0.792	0.184	0.179						
FPRO	0.786	0.200	0.756	0.323	0.306	0.728					
EIV	0.765	0.105	0.794	0.174	0.146	0.789	0.681				
FAD	0.739	0.142	0.821	0.224	0.192	0.782	0.695	0.827			
HRF	0.893	0.195	0.836	0.292	0.292	0.801	0.826	0.732	0.764		
ECT	0.857	0.171	0.822	0.244	0.229	0.863	0.833	0.842	0.811	0.838	

The HTMT results confirm discriminant validity, as all values presented are below 0.90. This indicates that each construct in the proposed model meets the requirements for structural equation modelling and demonstrates distinctiveness from other constructs.

To examine common method bias (CMB), a method proposed by Kock and Lynn (2012)[92] was utilised to test for multicollinearity. Table 19 displays the results of this test, providing variance inflation factors (VIFs) for all latent variables in the model. The VIF values assist in assessing the potential presence of CMB and multicollinearity in the data.

Table 19. Full collinearity statistics (VIF) results

Variable	VIS	CSP	IAB	ROP	RWD	ICP	FPRO	EIV	FAD	HRF	ECT
VIF	3.104	1.487	2.513	1.497	1.736	2.541	3.014	1.644	3.007	1.842	2.645

Table 4 shows that all VIFs for the latent variables in the model are below 3.3, in line with the recommendation by Kock and Lynn (2012)[92]. This suggests the absence of multicollinearity, indicating that the variables in the model are not highly correlated. This strengthens the reliability and validity of the analysis. Moreover, the lack of multicollinearity suggests that the model is not affected by common method bias (CMB), ensuring the credibility of the results.

Goodness-of-fit

R^2 and Q^2 are informative metrics for evaluating the model's quality, and Briones-Penalver et al. (2018)[93] suggest that they should exceed zero. Table 5 provides several goodness-of-fit measures for further analysis and interpretation.

Table 20. Goodness of fit results

Endogenous latent variable	R²	Q²	Standardised root mean square residual (SRMR)	Normed Fit Index (NFI)
CSP	0.267	0.257	0.076	0.907
PHR	0.175	0.169		

The findings demonstrate that the path model exhibits predictive significance for each dependent construct, as evidenced by the R^2 and Q^2 values exceeding zero. According to the results in Table 20, 26.7% of the total variability in CSP is explained by EFF, PHR, ETR, and ECR. In addition, 17.5% of the total variability in PHR is said by EFF, ETR, and ECR. Additionally, a standardised root mean square residual (SRMR) value of 0.076 supports the model's acceptability, which falls below the recommended threshold of 0.08. Furthermore, the Normed Fit Index (NFI) value of 0.907 surpasses the recommended threshold of 0.90, indicating a good fit between the model and the data.

Structural model and hypothesis testing

A structural model was used to capture the linear regression effects of the endogenous constructs on one another (Hair et al., 2013)[90]. These models can identify patterns of relationships among constructs. The PLS assessment of the model used path coefficients (β) and path significance (p-value). Figure 1 above visually presents the structural model's relationships and connections among the variables. It depicts the causal pathways and hypothesised associations between the constructs examined in the study. SmartPLS software was used to analyse the data and apply the partial least squares (PLS) approach to discover the correlations between the measurement elements. Figure 2 below shows the results.
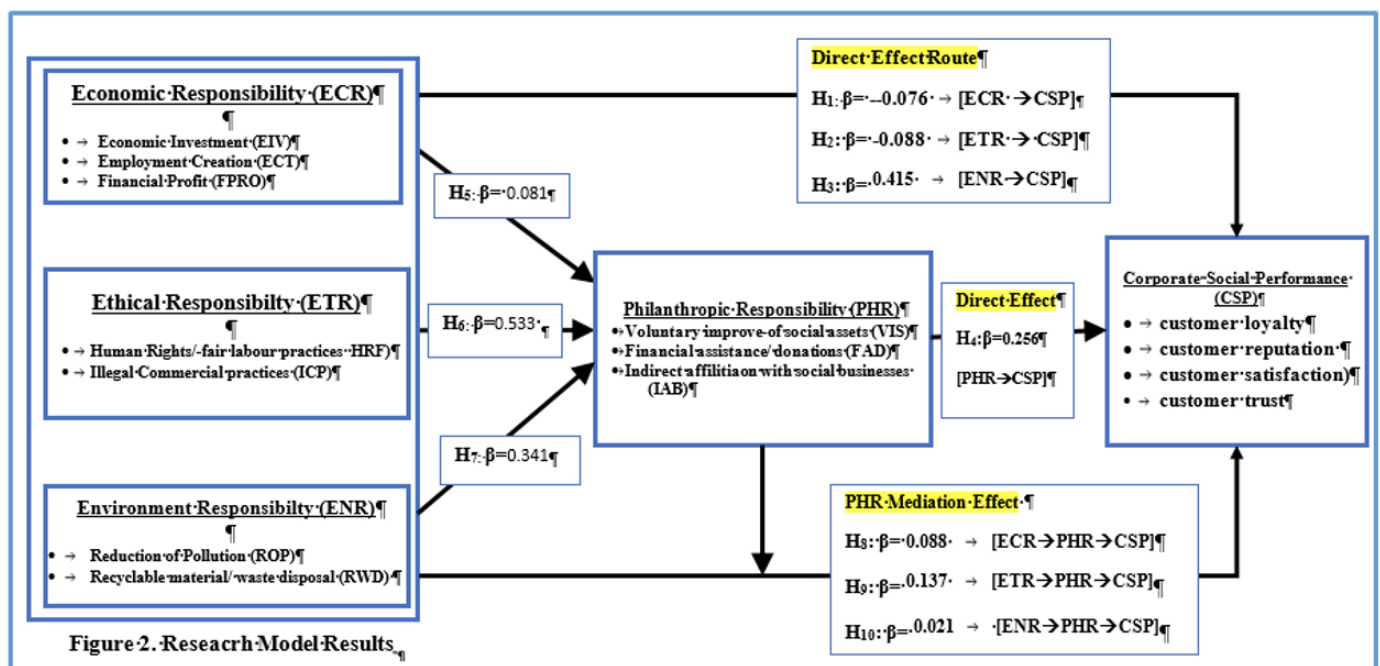

Figure 2. Research Model Results

Table 21 presents the PLS results for the structural model's hypothesised relationships.

Table 21. Structural model's PLS CSR direct relationship with CSP results

Hypothesis	Relationship	Coefficient (β)	SE	T	P-values	Decision
H1	ECR -> CSP	-0.076	0.048	1.570	0.116	Not Supported
H2	ETR -> CSP	-0.088	0.056	1.580	0.114	Not Supported
H3	ENR -> CSP	0.415	0.039	10.684	0.000	Supported
H4	PHR -> CSP	0.256	0.058	4.445	0.000	Supported

Both philanthropical and environmental constructs were substantial at p<0.01. The results in Table 21 indicate that ENR had a significant positive effect on CSP (β = 0.415, t=10.684, p <0.001), PHR had a significant positive impact on CSP (β = 0.256, t=4.445, p<0.001). However, ETR had an insignificant negative effect on CSP (β = -0.088, t=1.580, p =0.114), and ECR had a negligible negative impact on CSP (β = -0.076, t=1.570, p =0.116). These results suggest that H3 and H4 are supported. It can be noted that H1 and H2 are not supported. Based on these criteria, the results showed that only philanthropic (PHR) and environmental (ENR) constructs were significant in influencing corporate social performance (CSP), explaining 0.415 and 0.256 per unit in CSP, respectively.

Based on the notion that PHR is the essential driver for CSR, Table 22 presents SEM results relating ECR, ETR, and ENR with PHR—the exact relationship's hypothesis testing with PHR as a mediating factor among its relative CSR counterparts in Table 23 later.

Table 22. Structural model's PLS ECR, ENR, and ETR direct relationship with PHR results

Hypothesis	Relationship	Coefficient (β)	SE	T	P-values	Decision
H5	ENR -> PHR	0.081	0.027	3.024	0.003	Supported
H6	ETR -> PHR	0.533	0.028	19.199	0.000	Supported
H7	ECR -> PHR	0.341	0.033	10.357	0.000	Supported

The results in Table 22 are that ECR had a significant positive effect on PHR (β = 0.341, t=10.357, p<0.001), ETR had a significant positive impact on PHR (β = 0.533, t=19.199, p<0.001) and ENR had a significant positive effect on PHR (β = 0.081, t=3.024, p =0.003). The results suggest that H5, H6, and H7 are supported.

Mediating effect

Table 23 presents the results of the mediation hypotheses H8, H9, and H10, which examine the significance of both the

direct and indirect effects. The mediation investigation utilised a 95% confidence interval (CI) and 5000 bootstrapping samples.

Table 23. PHR Mediating Effects and ECR, ETR, and ENR on CSP

Hypothesis	Relationship	Coefficient				CI Bias-corrected	
		Beta	SE	T	P-value	2.50%	97.50%
H8	ECR -> PHR -> CSP	0.088	0.022	4.032	0.000	0.050	0.135
H9	ETR -> PHR -> CSP	0.137	0.032	4.337	0.000	0.077	0.198
H10c	ENR -> PHR -> CSP	0.021	0.009	2.416	0.016	0.007	0.041

The study found that PHR significantly mediates the relationship between ECR and CSP, as indicated by the p-value below the recommended value of 0.05 in addition to the 95% confidence interval (CI) excluding zero. Therefore, hypotheses H8, H9, and H10 are all supported.

Discussion and conclusions

The effect of CSR on business performance depends on specific circumstances. This study found a limited relationship between CSR and CSP in Zimbabwe's service-based industry. The little influence of CSR can be due to the tendency of organisations to adopt it in response to societal pressure rather than integrating it strategically into their broader business strategy (Zhang & Yi, 2022)[45]. The managers' assumptions about the impact of CSR on business growth could be their perceptions rather than verified facts. The stakeholders held differing opinions regarding the influence of CSR initiatives on their perceptions of the company. Some believed that CSR positively impacted corporate social performance (CSP), while others attributed CSP to customer loyalty, reputation, and trust. The study revealed that businesses in this sector implemented a range of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives focused on economic, environmental, and community development.

Economical CSR Initiatives and CSP

The results of the hypothesis testing in Table 21 indicate that economic constructs, specifically economic responsibility (ECR), do not significantly influence CSP. This finding aligns with previous studies by Zhong et al. (2022)[53] and Dlamini and Mavengere (2019)[94], highlighting a negative correlation between ECR and CSP, particularly in private firms. ECR is one of the four forms of CSR businesses can engage in to contribute to the community. It is frequently seen as the rationale behind the business case, as explained by Kaplan and McMillan (2020)[17]. Scholars have defined ECR as a company's activities aimed at fulfilling its profit objectives, which align with other CSR commitments (Zhong et al., 2022[53]; Randrianasolo & Semenov, 2022[7] Achmad, 2022[70]; Carroll & Shabana, 2010[46]). These ECR actions can

include investing in local communities, creating employment opportunities, and supporting local businesses. As such, companies can engage in production initiatives that reduce their carbon footprint and invest in renewable energy to conserve natural resources, not as a profit motive. By making these investment decisions, companies aim to achieve their nonfinancial goals (Wickert, 2021[10]; Carroll & Shabana, 2010[46]). The concept of ECR has sparked debates among researchers and stakeholders. Society believes running a business should not solely focus on profit but also contribute to a better community.

The relationship between CSR and business performance is intricate and has multiple dimensions. Adopting CSR has advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, implementing CSR practices can lead to benefits such as increased customer loyalty, financial stability, corporate legitimacy, and stakeholder value (Islam et al., 2021)[42].

However, some challenges and uncertainties come with embracing CSR. Before implementing CSR, businesses should thoroughly evaluate its advantages and disadvantages, considering the unique context and strategic planning (Zhang & Yi, 2022[45]; Carroll, 1991[5]).

Ethical CSR Initiatives and CSP

Based on the results indicating a lack of statistically significant influence of ethical constructs on corporate social performance, It is not advisable for businesses to exclusively depend on moral obligations towards corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices to enhance their overall performance. In addition to the factors above, it is imperative to consider operational efficiency, innovation, and customer satisfaction. Second, enterprises must comprehensively comprehend the diverse definitions and viewpoints about ethical responsibility. This understanding will assist individuals in aligning their behaviours with the anticipated desires and requirements of various stakeholders. Third, Managers should contemplate integrating CSR initiatives that align with their fundamental principles and brand image. This approach can enhance their reputation and bolster their CSR initiatives aligning with their core values. Certain managers emphasise CSR initiatives to garner greater recognition for their ethical conduct concerning shareholder remuneration (Chen et al., 2019)[48]. Simultaneously, governmental regulations mandate that corporations take measures to prevent environmental degradation and refrain from engaging in illegal activities.

Environmental CSR initiatives and CSP

The study's results indicate that environmental constructs significantly influence corporate social performance. This finding aligns with previous research that suggests customers expect businesses to take responsibility for their environmental impact and engage in sustainable practices. There is a growing societal demand for companies to adopt environmentally friendly practices and actively engage in community development (Baah et al., 2021)[64]. Ecological responsibility concerns the need for green legitimacy and regulatory stakeholder demands. It also pertains to a business organisation's commitment to maintaining an environmentally friendly environment. Environmental responsibility initiatives aim to minimise pollution and encourage businesses to adopt sustainable practices for utilising natural resources. This approach is related to environmental stewardship and calls for measures such as reducing pollution, greenhouse gas

emissions, single-use plastic consumption, water consumption, and communal waste (Abbas & Dogan, 2022[66]; Lee & Raschke, 2021[65]). Environmental responsibility assessments can enhance a company's support for renewable energy, sustainable resources, and recyclable materials, thereby reducing waste disposal. Companies that invest in environmental responsibility can improve their reputation and financial gains, especially when the costs associated with reducing emissions are relatively low. Overall, these findings highlight the significant comparative implications of incorporating environmental responsibility into business practices.

Philanthropic (PHR) CSR initiatives and CSP

The study findings presented in Table 22, the hypothesis testing criteria indicate a significant influence of philanthropic constructs (PHR) on CSP. Dlamini and Mavengere (2019)[94] argue that CSR in the service sector is more of philanthropy rather than being driven by marketing strategies. The current finding is consistent with previous studies (Aboud & Yang, 2022[26]; Abdelmoety et al., 2021[61]; Al-Abdallah & Ahmed, 2018[13]) that have also demonstrated the positive impact of community development corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives on a company's brand reputation, leading to the development of CSP. The findings mentioned are consistent with the study conducted by Ajina et al. (2019)[11], where they discovered a correlation between community economic empowerment corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives and their impact on small business performance (CSP). The findings presented in the text are consistent with the results of recent studies conducted by Zhong et al. (2022)[53], Randrianasolo & Semenov (2022)[7], and Achmad (2022)[70]. These studies highlight the various manifestations of philanthropic, corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives and their potential impact on business responsiveness. Specifically, such initiatives can foster emotional connections with customers and serve as a tangible demonstration of a company's dedication to social responsibility.

ECR, ENR, and ETR direct relationship with PHR results

Table 23 shows that all variants of H5 are acceptable based on these criteria, possibly implying that Zimbabwean businesses strongly harbour the notion of CSR as a more charitable imperative and a must for businesses to gain corporate social performance (CSP), explaining ECR (β = 0.341), ETR (β = 0.533), ENR(β = 0.081) per change unit in PHR, respectively. Legitimacy responsibility is most assertive at 53.3 % influence, followed by an economic and poor show for environmental concerns toward PHR, which may be due to related government compliance affirmative programs and fiscal taxation incentives being the major assumed drivers for CSR adoption by business organisations.

PHR Mediating Effects and ECR, ETR, and ENR on CSP

The results indicate that PHR is a significant mediator in the relationship between ENR, CSP, and ETR and CSP. This result suggests that PHR is crucial in explaining the relationship between these variables. Furthermore, the discussion on CSR and CSP highlights positive and negative implications. On the positive side, CSR allows businesses to consider the welfare of various stakeholders and create a favourable image of the company(Abbas & Dogan, 2022[66]; Allui & Pinto, 2022[6]; Abdelmoety et al., 2021[61]; Kaplan & McMillan, 2020[17]). It also helps meet societal expectations and can be

used as a competitive advantage(Wickert, 2021[10]; Wong & Dhanesh, 2017[63]; Lubin & Esty, 2010[95]). However, CSR also comes with responsibilities, including economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic aspects, which ensure compliance with the law, avoid harm to society, and contribute to community development(Liqi et al., 2022)[96]. We assess that PHR is a necessary but insufficient condition for sustainable performance. PHR alone will not guarantee to improve organisational performance. The sustainable corporate performance growth brought about by the interaction of CSR elements fuels business growth. Firms only align their social, economic, and environmental investments when markets and demand expand due to stakeholder value creation. However, firms require investment in CSR to achieve success resulting from stakeholder cooperation.

Theoretical implications

The integration of theories enhances the understanding of CSR and sustainable business practices. The strategy considers all stakeholders' needs and rights, promotes openness and responsibility, and achieves a harmonious equilibrium between economic, social, and environmental considerations. The fusion of these theories promotes a holistic understanding of CSR, considering its impact on the economy, environment, and society. This strategy acknowledges the significance of businesses in improving society and the environment. Integrating economic advancement and sustainability within organisations can enhance their long-term resilience and success. By incorporating sustainable practices, organisations can ensure their operations are environmentally friendly and socially responsible. This process helps protect the planet and its resources and fosters a positive reputation among stakeholders.

Furthermore, businesses can enhance their competitiveness by adopting innovative strategies and technologies that promote growth and profitability. By combining these two aspects, organisations can create a strong foundation for long-term success. Integration involves approaching financial goals and a commitment to social and environmental issues in a balanced manner. This approach guarantees that all aspects are thoroughly considered and addressed. By integrating these elements, organisations can strive for sustainable development and long-term success. This approach recognises the interconnectedness of financial, social, and environmental factors and seeks solutions that benefit all stakeholders. Organisations can make more informed and responsible choices by considering the impact of economic decisions on social and environmental issues. Integrating financial goals and social and ecological concerns is crucial for creating a more sustainable and equitable future.

Practical implications

This study has two main practical implications for business firms considering CSR. First, the most widely used CSR strategies were philanthropical. The approach corresponded closely with the most popular once-off donations for charitable concerns with a limited community developmental agenda. Thus, social marketing is the primary concern. This study reveals support for ECR, ENR, and ETR's direct relationship with PHR, demonstrating the reasonable citizenry expectation for business as integral to their communities. Thus, offering opportunities could exploit and explore nurturing customer loyalty and corporate social performance. Al-Abdallah and Ahmed (2018)[13] suggest that CSR initiatives,

including sustainability, ethical sourcing, and community involvement, demonstrate a business organisation's commitment to the welfare of stakeholders and the environment. Customers are more likely to be loyal to a business if they believe it positively impacts society. Recent studies have shown that implementing processes with indirect affiliation to the business activities (IAB) could be initiatives that can effectively cultivate a positive brand image and improve reputation in their serviced communities. CSR can develop long-lasting and reliable relationships between businesses and customers, improving performance (Le, 2022[36]; Islam et al., 2021[42]; Devie et al., 2020[43]).

Other studies have suggested that some firms have adopted CSR simply because everyone else in the industry was doing so, and they did not want to be left behind. The motives are less strategic engagement but event-specific. For example, it could be assistance in responding to a once-off natural disaster in a community. However, it is essential to note that these firms may not adequately consider the effective implementation of CSR principles, which could explain the absence of a significant correlation between economic responsibility (ECR) and ethical responsibility (ETR) and improved performance in this study. The study revealed similar findings to those of Dlamini and Mavengere (2019)[94] in Zimbabwe: an insignificant negative relationship between CSR and financial performance.

In summary, the available evidence suggests that adopting CSR has a limited impact on organisational performance—little research on the potential benefits of strategic CSR principles exists. Existing studies, including the ones cited, have yielded inconclusive findings similar to this research.

Public policy implications

Government policies can establish a framework and guidelines for businesses to adhere to when implementing CSR practices. These policies set the standards and obligations for companies to participate in CSR initiatives, including promoting environmental sustainability, contributing to community development, and adhering to ethical business practices. The government can encourage businesses to prioritise CSR and ensure accountability by implementing well-defined standards and regulations.

Second, financial incentives from the government might persuade companies to implement and finance CSR programmes. Businesses that show a commitment to CSR can receive support in the form of tax breaks, grants, or subsidies. The government can encourage firms to allocate resources towards CSR activities by offering financial incentives. This positive act can lead to positive social and environmental outcomes.

However, government penalties can discourage businesses from neglecting their CSR obligations. The government can ensure enterprises prioritise their social and environmental commitments by implementing fines, sanctions, or legal consequences for non-compliance with CSR regulations. Penalties can create a fair business environment by discouraging unethical practices and promoting responsible behaviour.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the relationship between CSR and business performance is complex and depends on specific circumstances. The study found a limited relationship between CSR and CSP in Zimbabwe's service-based industry. This little influence of CSR may be due to organisations adopting it in response to societal pressure rather than integrating it strategically into their business strategy. The study also revealed that stakeholders had differing opinions on the impact of CSR initiatives on their perceptions of the company. Some believed that CSR positively impacted CSP, while others attributed CSP to customer satisfaction and trust.

Furthermore, the study found that economic responsibility (ECR) did not significantly influence CSP, while ethical and environmental responsibilities had a significant impact. The study discovered a considerable influence of philanthropic commitment (PHR) on CSR and CSP. These findings suggest businesses should not rely solely on moral obligations towards CSR practices to enhance their overall performance. Instead, they should consider operational efficiency, innovation, customer satisfaction, and aligning CSR initiatives with their core values and brand image.

Incorporating environmental responsibility into business practices can have significant comparative implications, while philanthropic CSR initiatives can positively impact a company's brand reputation and contribute to CSP. The study emphasises the importance of philanthropic CSR initiatives in mediating the relationship between various CSR constructs (economic, ethical, and environmental) and corporate social performance. This finding highlights the importance of analysing the interaction between different dimensions of CSR and how they collectively impact performance. However, it is essential to note that philanthropic CSR alone is insufficient for sustainable performance, and businesses need to invest in CSR elements that align with stakeholder cooperation and contribute to stakeholder value creation.

Limitations and future research

This study's scope is limited to the service-based industry in Zimbabwe, potentially constraining the generalizability of the results to other sectors or developing countries. The relevance of the results to businesses operating in different contexts or sectors remains unclear.

The study's use of cross-sectional data limits its ability to establish causal relationships between CSR and CSP because longitudinal data is unavailable. Longitudinal data provides a comprehensive understanding of the long-term effects of CSR on CSP, encompassing trends and patterns.

The study acknowledges that stakeholders have differing opinions on the impact of CSR on CSP. The assessment of the effects of CSR on CSP is challenging due to subjective perceptions and individual biases. This limitation hampers the capacity to establish conclusive findings.

The analysis primarily focuses on CSR initiatives encompassing economic, ethical, environmental, and philanthropic aspects. However, it only takes into account a restricted range of variables. This study does not comprehensively examine other factors that could impact CSP, including innovation, operational efficiency, and employee satisfaction. This study's limited scope may overlook significant variables that could improve our understanding of the relationship between CSR

and CSP.

The study acknowledges that stakeholders hold different views on the impact of CSR on CSP despite the limitations of subjective perceptions. This recognition underscores the necessity for further investigation and analysis of the factors that impact performance, thus highlighting the complex nature of this relationship.

Based on the limitations of the study, the recommends three areas for future inquiry as follows:

- **A longitudinal study with a cross-section design:** Future research could conduct a longitudinal study with a measurable set of clear, relevant, economic, adequate, and monitorable (CREAM) indicators to isolate the impact of CSR initiatives on CSP in a dynamic process. This study would allow researchers to observe, monitor, and evaluate changes in CSP over time and determine whether these changes are solely due to CSR initiatives or other factors. A baseline study will also select the critical indicators for comparison, allowing researchers to assess how CSR initiatives drive CSP in the funeral assurance industry.
- **Replication with a multi-sector industry larger sample size:** Future research could replicate this study with a diverse sample to improve the generalisability of the findings. A multiple-sector sample profile would allow researchers to explore the relationship between CSR initiatives and CSP across different economic set-ups and demographic groups.
- **Investigation of other factors influencing CSP:** Despite limitations in scope and subjective perceptions, this study provides valuable insights into the correlation between CSR and CSP in Zimbabwe's service-based industry. Conducting a comprehensive analysis that thoroughly examines CSR initiatives and identifies any mediating effects is crucial.

Statements and Declarations

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