Journal of Management Science Research Review
https://jmsrr.com/index.php/Journal/about

Volume 5 Issue No 1 (2026)

Online ISSN: 3006-2047
Print ISSN: 3006-2039

Influence of Digital CSR Messages on Gen Z Brand Engagement

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Abstract
The growing significance of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) within the digital domain has influenced and brought about changes concerning the engagement approach being adopted by brands and socially conscious consumers, particularly Gen Z. Gen Z consumers, as online natives, scrutinize brands based on their ideologically driven values and commitments articulated on online platforms. The impact of online CSR messages toward Gen Z engagement with brands is explored in this research study specifically related to emotional engagement, trust, value concordance, and interactivity. This study on CSR messages and Gen Z engagement applies a qualitative research approach using help from eight semi structured interviews conducted on Gen Z students across different universities in Pakistan to examine and explore the personal constructs and perceptions related to Gen Z consumers about online CSR message interpretation and meanings derived through this study based on its dataset. The data collected through research has been explored using thematic data analysis to extract key dimensions and determining drivers related to Gen Z engagement as revealed through findings presented below. Emotional engagement was identified as an important mechanism by which CSR communication helps to humanize brands and create positive brand attitudes. Trust was indicated to vary from being dependent on consistency, credibility, and congruence between espoused values and brand performance. Also, interactive and richly visual CSR communication, including short video messages, voting universals, and campaigns led by influencers, was indicated to enhance cognitive, emotional and behavioral engagement among Gen Z. The symbolic CSR communication type was shown to create distrust and disengage Gen Z. The study makes an original contribution to both CSR communication and brand engagement literature by introducing a consumer and qualitative perspective on Gen Z response behaviors toward online CSR communication.

Keywords: Digital CSR, Generation Z, Brand Engagement

Introduction

The rising trend of corporate social responsibility has significantly influenced the way brands engage with their customers within digital platforms. Digital CSR

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Online ISSN: 3006-2047
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communication generally refers to the process through which information regarding social and environmental initiatives is communicated using online platforms such as social networks, organizational websites, and organizational applications (Troise & Camilleri, 2021; Xiong, 2024). In essence, online social media platforms make it easier for organizations to display their CSR initiatives on an interactive, pictorial, or real-time basis, thus improving their transparency (Xiong, 2024). Generation Z (Gen Z), people born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, is one of the most socially engaged and tech-savvy groups as far as consumers are concerned. Gen Z, as digital natives, look actively for brands expressing adherence to ethics, social causes, and contributions toward society (Theocharis & Tsekouropoulos, 2025). In their view, an association or relationship is formed on mutually harmonized principles, incorporating values alongside social contributions.

Brand engagement is a representation of consumers' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral interaction with and commitment to a brand and refers to a construct that exceeds purchase behavior and includes interaction with, advocacy for, and participation in brand-related activities (Helme-Guizon & Magnoni, 2019). The interactive nature of digital CSR communications could promote brand engagement through developing consumer emotional associations and reinforcing brand credibility (Dundua, 2023). An effective communication channel for CSR could promote Gen Z's engagement and enhance their emotional closeness with a brand.

Conversely, Gen Z consumers are also very critical and skeptical of non-authentic CSR communication (Zarkawi & Chelekkal, 2024). The prevalence of greenwashing and symbolic CSR activities has heightened the level of consumer scrutiny, especially in the digital platform era, as consumer access to knowledge is facilitated and disseminated through the digital platform (Famularo, 2023). This suggests that the non-authenticity, inconsistency, or promotional presentation of CSR communications may affect consumer trust and engagement with the brands. The authenticity, transparency, and interactivity in digital CSR communications thus gain great significance. Although scholars have noted the growing concern for CSR topics in the context of digital marketing, it is actually limited to understanding the implications of digital CSR communications for the engagement of Gen Z consumers with the brands in the context of qualitative applications (Mc Elwee & Khan, 2024; Narayanan, 2022; Papadopoulos, Arsenos, Sykianakis, & Stavroulakis, 2025). This study aims to add knowledge in current literature by applying the concepts of authenticity, trust, emotional linkages, and interactivity in digital CSR communications for understanding the implications of digital CSR communications for Gen Z consumer engagement with the brands.

Despite the increasing use of digital CSR communication by brands to attract socially conscious consumers, the impact of such communication on Gen Z is still unclear. While CSR communication is beneficial in improving engagement and trust, inappropriate and fake CSR communication may activate a sense of disbelief and disengage consumers (Kim & Rim, 2024). Little research is done regarding the interpretation of digital CSR communication by Gen Z consumers and how such

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interpretation affects their engagement through brands. This is a problem for brands seeking to develop an effective digital CSR strategy.

Research Objectives

To determine the impact of online CSR communications on Gen Z consumers' brand values and sense of relevance.
To determine the significance of digital CSR communication in building trust towards brands among the Gen Z generation.
To determine how emotional connections and value alignments attributed to digital CSR messaging influence Gen Z levels of engagement with brands.
To determine the influence of interactivity in online CSR communication on Gen Z's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement

Research Questions

How do digital CSR communications affect the perceptions of values and relevance in Gen Z Consumers?
How important are digital messages conveying CSR in the creation or destruction of trust among Gen Z consumers?
What impact emotional connection and digital CSR communication have on brand engagement among Gen Z?
In what way does interactivity in the digital communication of CSR impact the engagement of Generation Z with brands?

Literature Review

Digital Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Digital corporate social responsibility is defined as the use of social, environmental, and ethical initiatives undertaken by the organization to strategically convey corporate information and activities on digital platforms such as social media sites, corporate websites, corporate blogs, and corporate mobile applications (Gomez-Vasquez, 2023). Digital media has caused the shift from the reporting function to the dialogical function in corporate social responsibility (Troise & Camilleri, 2021). Digital media has enabled companies to share social responsibility activities in the form of stories, videos, images, and live updates so that social responsibilities are more visible to the CSR consumer (EMMA, 2024; Xiong, 2024).

The existing literature suggests a positive effect of digital CSR communication on corporate legitimacy and accountability (Camilleri, 2017; Kesar, 2025; Troise & Camilleri, 2021). In addition to this, it is suggested that digital media provide an opportunity for stakeholders to provide feedback to firms and engage with them through interactions and conversations. This further plays a pivotal role in furthering accountability and responsibility (Dundua, 2023). The positivity and negativity surrounding digital media remain inherent to its nature. There is scope for stakeholders to expose firms for any kind of discrepancy between their statements and actions. This suggests that digital CSR communication must align with actual actions and not remain simply symbolic (Okazaki, Plangger, West & Menéndez, 2020).

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Moreover, digital CSR communication might prove to remain a potent influence on consumer perception and brand relationship-building.

Characteristics of Gen Z Consumers

The Generation Z consumer is known for their nativeness to technology, social awareness, and sensitivity towards the authenticity of the brand's communication efforts (Asiabar, Asiabar & Asiabar, 2024). The Generation Z consumer has been social media savvy all their lives and has access to all the information in the world at all times, making them incredibly adept at analyzing the claims made by the corporation and detecting exaggerations/impossibilities in them (Indrayani, 2024). They look for corporate to perform beyond the bounds of the profit-making mission, contributing positively towards the well-being of society. They monitor the behavior, ethics, and social commitments of the corporate, with the views of third parties such as reviews on social media helping to corroborate the claims made by the corporation in many cases (Zarkawi & Chelekkal, 2024). Thus, Gen Z embodies a very low tolerance level towards greenwashing, activism by doing, and deceptive communication (Bytof & Ritch, 2023). Indeed, brands that lack the authenticity to portray social responsibility will find it difficult to connect with Gen Z. In contrast to this, brands that practice open communication and have brand values in line with social and environmental causes will find it easier to connect with this generation and develop trust as well as an emotional bond with them (Pattanaik, 2024). Certainly, to Gen Z, authentic brand relationships are embedded in socially shared values and actions rather than promotional messaging ideals (Theocharis & Tsekouropoulos, 2025).

Research indicates Gen Z considers important ethical principles like sustainability, inclusivity, and social justice when creating brand preference and engagement choices (Halibas, et al., 2025). CSR is studied as an important dimension rather than an important optional dimension. Gen Z is very critical about mainstream advertisement as well as corporate advertisement (Duyen, 2025). Even Gen Z is very reliant on peer influence regarding online-formulated opinions about brands as well as third-party opinions. CSR messages targeting Gen Z must therefore present facts instead of assumptions. Brands failing to meet expectations will experience diminished engagement, social disengagement, and decreased credibility (Tosun, et al., 2024).

Digital CSR Messages and Brand Engagement

Digital CSR Messages and Brand Engagement

Brand engagement is a multidimensional construct involving cognition, emotion, and behavior toward a brand (Fernandes & Moreira, 2019). Digital CSR messages can enhance brand engagement due to evoking values and emotions from consumers, thus intensifying their psychological association with the brand. This can also be achieved through stages of CSR communication on digital platforms where consumers are encouraged to participate in social initiatives and not just informed (Loureiro & Lopes, 2019).

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Although empirical studies show that in general awareness of CSR-related content has a positive influence on engagement, consumers perceive it as appropriate and significant (Badenes-Rocha, Ruiz-Mafé & Bigné, 2019; Sarkar & Sarkar, 2020). The Gen Z way of engaging is liking, sharing, commenting, and taking part in CSR-focused campaigns. However, the engagement measure depends on the perceived sincerity of the message (Ryu, 2024). Engagement does not come easy with CSR programs that are perceived to be shallow or opportunistic. Some studies suggest that CSR messages work better when combined with the core identity of the brand than as a standalone promotional activity (Fernandez, Hartmann & Apaolaza, 2022; Pérez, 2019). The more CSR is associated with the broader company narrative, the more long-term emotional, cognitive, or behavioral engagement that it is likely to elicit (Li, Sial, Wu, Căpușneanu & Barbu, 2023).

Trust and Authenticity in Digital CSR Communication

Trust refers to how much a consumer can believe the brand claims about its online CSR efforts, that is, the claims of its social responsibility activities, honesty, transparency, and of course, support by action (Lee, 2025). The authentic CSR message that is perceived as sincere and reflects actual value systems of organizations as opposed to some marketing tricks (Pérez, 2019). When consumers perceive CSR as authentic communications, they will likely respond positively to and use the digital channel of the brand. On the other hand, inconsistency between what is communicated in the messages and what is done in practice can quickly erode trust by an eye view in a digital environment in which information flows rapidly. This is particularly relevant when it comes to young consumers who actively monitor brand behavior and can demand accountability. So, in evidence-based storytelling with consistent long-term commitment to social causes would enhance credibility and reinforce trust (Nguyen, Trinh, Tran & Duong, 2025). Thus, rather than having elements such as direct communication or evaluation, the trust and authenticity elements act as critical mechanisms through which digital CSR communication affects brand engagement and relationship quality (Lim & Jiang, 2024).

According to previous studies, it can be said that transparency and consistency across digital channels, with provision for verifiable evidence, add more trust in CSR initiatives (Nguyen, Trinh, Tran & Duong, 2025; Yu, Zhou, He & Si, 2022). For Gen Z consumers, authenticity is very important due to a general increase in awareness toward greenwashing and symbolic CSR (Papadopoulos, Arsenos, Sykianakis & Stavroulakis, 2025). This generation is known as the group that largely questions corporate motives and demands proof of show of sustained value. When CSR messages seem authentic, they enhance credibility for the brand and further deepen engagement (Pérez, 2019). On the contrary, inauthentic CSR communications can quickly lead to a loss of trust and damage brand relationships (Lim & Jiang, 2024). Thus, trust and authenticity serve as critical mediators between the digital CSR message and the level of brand engagement.

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Emotional Connection and Value Alignment

Emotional association is that particular affective bond generated when consumers realize that a brand sincerely reflects their personal values and social concerns (Shao, 2024). Because digital CSR messages concentrate on issues at the heart of Generation Z-such as sustainability and equality, there is a definite potential for messaging to strengthen emotional ties to the demographic (Papadopoulos et al., 2025). Empathy, pride, inspiration, and so forth can be kindled with emotional storytelling or the impact-oriented narrative (Dornan, 2025). Consumers tend to build an emotional relationship with a brand for its social action initiatives. This attachment, however, develops positive attitudes toward the brand, while encouraging some continuous engagement behavior, such as sharing and advocating it. Consequently, an emotional connection would be the necessary channel through which digital CSR communication augments long-term brand participation (Pohorelov, 2024).

Consumer perception of congruence between the consumer's own beliefs and a brand's CSR initiatives moves in the direction of value alignment. Consumer research inherently fosters emotional attachment, trust, and advocacy behaviors (Ahmad, Ahmad, & Siddique, 2024; Salah, Elmahdy, Abdelfattah, Tawfik, Mohammed, Wagih, & Mohammed, 2024). For Gen Z consumers, relating or matching values is critical in seeing brands as being relevant or has meaning in social terms (Dobre, Milovan, Duțu, Preda & Agapie, 2021). Therefore, digital CSR messages aligned with Gen Z's ethical pursuits will help produce deeper emotional engagement, thus promoting long-term relationships. Singh, Chaudhuri, Chatterjee, Vrontis and Yildiz (2024) posit that emotional connection and value alignment are much vital in creating the necessary drivers for sustained brand engagement in digitalized CSR contexts.

Interactivity in Digital CSR Communication

The interactivity enables digital communication to be significant in promoting interactions with the brand among Gen Z consumers (Sari, Ginting, Lubis, & Situmorang, 2023). There are interactive aspects in digital CSR communication where consumers can post their remarks and offer feedback and be involved in the interaction with digital CSR programs (Xiong, 2024). There are several aspects in communication that are interactive in nature, including the use of polls, challenges, and user-generated content campaigns (Lariba, 2023). Through their participation, Gen Z consumers relate more to the brands and the social causes presented. Interactivity then changes CSR communication, from a one-way sharing of information to a two-way collaborative and shared experience, and thus enhancing perceived relevance and authenticity. When brands invite consumer feedback, seek dialogue with consumers, and prove such engagement in a meaningful way, consumers are more likely to build an emotional attachment and sustained engagement with the CSR program (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). Thus, interactivity plays a decisive role in transforming digital CSR messages into relevant cognitive, emotional, and behavioral brand engagements.

Research shows that interactive CSR communication by inviting participation and co-creation enhances behavioral engagement (Lee, Kim & Kim, 2020; Yang, Song,

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Zhang & Hu, 2025). For Gen Z, engagement is heavily intertwined with the element of dialogue and contribution. Brands responding to feedback and providing consumer participation in CSR projects are likely to build strong as well as long-term engagement (Pandita & Khatwani, 2022). On the other hand, a one-way CSR communication process may be disempowering for consumers, while the lack of interactivity may let CSR projects appear less than sincere from a consumer's perspective (Kim, 2019). Therefore, interactivity becomes an important translator of digital CSR messages into meaningful engagement indicators.

Methodology

Research Approach

This study opted for a qualitative research design to explore Gen Z brand engagement and the subsequent effects of digital CSR messages. Qualitative research is most appropriate for understanding the complexities of social phenomena whose resolution entails perceptions, emotions, and value-based judgments (Karimi-Dehkordi & Clark, 2020). Digital CSR communication implies a host of subjective interpretations of authenticity, trust, and emotional connection, which cannot be grasped by quantitative methods alone. Research on Gen Z consumers will help to show experiences that can explain and illustrate their message interpretations and internalizations regarding CSR messages (Kelly, 2025). Researching through qualitative methods allows for investigation in areas of theory where understanding is still being developed. The use of rich description through interviews allows for profound insights into relational message engagement on digital CSR.

This research is based on an interpretivist research design. Understandings based on interpretivism lie on the basis that reality is social in its construction; people interpret experiences based on personal values and beliefs (Saunders et al., 2019). When it comes to the interpretation of digital CSR activities, Gen Z may interpret similar messages differently on the basis of various expectations and ethical understandings.

Data collection and analysis method

Semi-structured interviews are employed as the main method of data collection. This allows some degree of flexibility on the part of the interviewer in order to add new questions depending on the emerging themes during the interviews. Semi-structured interviews have immense value when topics under consideration are sensitive in nature, such as trust, authenticity, as well as skepticism about the communication of CSR. This is because the questions enable participants to express their views in a manner they wish to, thus allowing the collection of in-depth data (Komildjanovna, 2024). The list of questions for conducting an interview has been arranged around topics identified in literature reviews related to issues of digital CSR communication, emotional bonding, trust, and behaviors of engagement.

Analysis of qualitative data collected through interviews takes the form of thematic research. Thematic analysis can be characterized as the process of identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns or themes within a data set (Neuendorf, 2018). It serves very well for exploratory investigations and the formulation of theory. Analysis

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consists of a process of familiarization with the data, initial coding, generation of themes, and refinement.
In all of these stages, comparison between the themes generated and the relevant literature is made with great intensity to enhance theoretical coherence.

Data Analysis

This study investigated how digital Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) messages impact Gen Zs with respect to brand engagement. The objectives were pursued through eight semi-structured interviews administrated to university students from various higher education institutions in Pakistan. All the interviewees belonged to Generation Z, and they formed parts of different academic backgrounds; hence, looking their diverse approach to digital CSR communication. The analysis was concerned with finding the patterns/themes that were running across variables or constructs such as emotional response, trust-building, perceived brand values, and drivers of engagement in relation to digital CSR messages.
The thematic analysis method was chosen to interpret the qualitative data. The themes addressed were emotional bond, authentic communication, and trust, creativity, and engagement mechanisms. These themes highlight how Gen Z consumers go about interpreting, evaluating, and responding to CSR messages communicated through digital means.

Demographic Information of Respondents

Representing the Gen Z cohort, the respondents were all university students whose interactions with the digital world occurred at a level of exposure and sensitivity toward social and environmental issues. This demographic focus allowed the study to tap into fresh insights into how Gen Z thinks about digital CSR messages.

Table 4.1

Respondent	Institution
R1	University of Central Punjab
R2	University of Central Punjab
R3	Riphah University
R4	Virtual University
R5	Forman Christian College
R6	Punjab University
R7	University of Management Technology
R8	Information Technology University

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Phases of Thematic Analysis

The six phases of thematic analysis described by Nowell et al., (2017) followed the data analysis. This basically meant systematic identification and interpretation of meaningful patterns emerging from the data of interviews.

Thematic Analysis Based on Interview Questions

Question 1: How does a brand make you feel when they talk online about social or environmental causes?

Theme 1: Emotional Connection

Table 4.2

Initial Code	Data Extract	Re-coded As	Theme
Feeling connected	R1: "I feel more connected to them."	Emotional bond	Emotional Connection
Positive feelings	R2: "I feel positive when brands talk about causes."	Positive perception	
Respect	R4: "It makes me respect the brand more."	Brand respect	
Pride	R5: "I feel proud to buy from such brands."	Emotional pride	
Humanized brand	R6: "The brand feels human."	Brand humanization	

Results

The findings show that there is a strong impact of digital CSR messages on the emotional responses of Gen Z consumers towards brands. Informants frequently mentioned feelings of pride, respect, connection, and admiration aimed at brands openly discussing social or environmental causes online. These emotional reactions translate into the CSR communication humanizing brands and presenting them as socially conscious, rather than sheer-for-profit organizations. Emotional connection thus came out strong as a basis for engagement; for respondents are more inclined to support brands that truly care about the well-being of society and the environment. Positive emotions enhance brand likability and foster positive attitudes, both of which are vital antecedents of deeper engagement behaviors such as following brand content, sharing posts, and staying with it over time. Thus, from this perspective, emotional resonance is highly important in nurturing Gen Z brand engagement through digital CSR messaging.

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Question 2: What makes a digital CSR message stand out to you?
Theme 2: Credible Communication
Table 4.3

Initial Code	Data Extract	Re-coded As	Theme
Clear message	R1: "Clear, simple, and backed with proof."	Message clarity	Credible Communication
Honesty	R2: "Honesty makes it stand out."	Authenticity	
Creativity	R3: "Creative campaigns catch my eye."	Creative appeal	
Facts & stats	R4: "Facts and real evidence."	Evidence-based	
Design	R5: "Creative designs and slogans."	Visual creativity	

Results

Participants asserted that digital CSR messages are at their best when they are creatively presented while remaining clear and provide credible evidence. Gen Z consumers have a high tendency to easily understand the social intentions of a brand through clear and simple messaging. For example, clever use of visuals, slogans, and campaigns gets the consumers' attention amidst the crowded digital space. The respondents stressed the need for CSR messages to be backed up by tangible actions, facts, or statistics to add to the credibility of the communication. CSR thus appears to them as unpersuasive and not worthy of attention if not backed by credible proof or originality. These findings seem to indicate is that Gen Z consumers are discriminating and mindful audiences who appreciate transparency and innovation. Firms able to attract attention through innovative and meaningful display of CSR messages would probably gain CSR credibility and engage on a deeper level with these consumers across digital platforms.

Question 3: How does a digital CSR message influence your view of a brand?
Theme 3: Ethical Branding
Table 4.4

Initial Code	Data Extract	Re-coded As	Theme
Responsibility	R1: "The brand is responsible."	Ethical image	Ethical Branding
Impact awareness	R2: "Shows how the brand impacts lives."	Social awareness	
Ethics	R3: "The brand is ethical."	Moral positioning	
Contribution	R4: "Shows the brand's role in	Social contribution	

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Initial Code	Data Extract	Re-coded As	Theme
	society."		
Future focus	R8: "Care for future generations."	Long-term responsibility	

Results

The analysis revealed that digital CSR messages very much shape Gen Z views about the ethical identity of a brand. Respondents have viewed CSR communication with words such as responsibility, fairness, and social awareness. When brands talked about issues such as environmental protection or social welfare, those were believed to be ethical and morally grounded organizations by the participants. In this way, the ethical standpoint enhanced the impression of a brand and distinguished socially responsible brands from competitors. CSR messages assessed whether a brand is contributing positively to society and future generations or not in the minds of respondents. Such perception strengthens value-based links between consumers and brands, which matter a lot in the case of Gen Z. This means that digital CSR communication becomes an instrument for building that responsible and trustworthy brand identity in the minds of an enlightened young consumer.

Question 4: What factors determine trust or distrust in digital CSR messages?

Theme 4: Trust Formation

Table 4.5

Initial Code	Data Extract	Re-coded As	Theme
Action-match	R1: "Actions match words."	Authenticity	Trust Formation
Transparency	R2: "Transparency builds trust."	Openness	
Evidence	R4: "I trust when they show evidence."	Proof-based trust	
Consistency	R5: "Consistent over time."	Long-term commitment	
Originality	R8: "Lack originality reduces trust."	Credibility	

Results

Trust was a significant driver affecting how Gen Z consumers responded to digital CSR messages. The participants emphasized the necessity of providing the foundations for trust-building like transparency, consistency, and congruence of words to actions. CSR communication was rated as credible by participants who saw the provision of evidence of real initiatives, long-term open commitment in communicating these initiatives, and a long history of practicing what they preach. In contrast, exaggeration, lack of detail, and promotion of questionable one-shot

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campaigns put them off these initiatives. Consequently, the gents were especially wary of CSR messages interpreted as performative or a copycat of another brand. The study therefore revealed that Gen Z is very much aware of the greenwashing scams. Therefore, maintaining and transparent CSR communication becomes very crucial for trust-building and ensuring that CSR contributes positively to brand engagement.

Question 5: How do digital CSR messages define brand values for you?

Theme 5: Brand Values

Table 4.6

Initial Code	Data Extract	Re-coded As	Theme
Care	R1: "Values care and responsibility."	Social concern	Brand Values
Fairness	R2: "Shows fairness."	Ethical values	
Responsibility	R3: "Socially aware."	Responsibility	
Modern	R5: "Caring and modern."	Progressive image	
Innovation	R8: "Innovative and caring."	Forward-thinking	

Results

Brands communicate their values to consumers and mostly through Digital Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) messages, which found expression with Gen Z participants in interpreting CSR posts. These participants viewed CSR posts as telling about a brand's core government principles like care, fairness, responsibility, and innovation. When such values matched individual belief systems, that participant felt much more a part of the identity of the brand. It is this identification that enhances emotional attachment and increases the chance of being engaged and supported. At a different level, CSR communications register a change or trend in listing brands among modernized think tanks, an attractive survey to Gen Z. This insinuates that CSR messages are symbol cues within which consumers can assess whether a brand tends to share their worldview. Digital CSR communication of value alignment is a major force pulling Gen Z consumers towards a brand.

Question 6: What changes would make digital CSR messages more engaging for Gen Z?

Theme 6: Interactive Engagement

Table 4.7

Initial Code	Data Extract	Re-coded As	Theme
Visuals	R1: "Visuals and short clips."	Visual engagement	Interactive Engagement
Memes	R2: "Memes and relatable content."	Youth relevance	
Interactivity	R3: "Polls and interactive	Participation	

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Initial Code	Data Extract	Re-coded As	Theme
	posts."		
Testimonials	R4: "Youth voices."	Peer influence	
Influencers	R6: "Using influencers."	Social validation	

Results

Gen Z was found to engage more in digital CSR messages when the content is interactive, attractive and relatable across age groups. They often include short videos, reels, memes, polls, and challenges as examples of engagement. Also, the value respondents attached to the voices of youth, influencers, and real-life stories was increased authenticity and relatability. Participation rather than passive consumption is what interactive CSR content elicits among this increasingly self-conscious generation concerning social causes branded for them. Indeed, it shows that traditional, lengthy, written CSR messages are rather worst streets for Gen Z audiences. Instead, the adoption of dynamic and participatory communication strategies compatible with Gen Z's digital habits must be embraced by brands to get maximum reach and impact.

Discussion and Conclusion

The primary objective of this study is on understanding the impact of digital Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) messages on Gen Z engagement with brands in Pakistan. Qualitative insights were derived from conducting eight semi-structured interviews of university students pertaining to a variety of institutions to provide nuanced understanding of how Gen Z consumers interpret, evaluate, and respond to CSR communication shared through digital platforms. Findings showed that brands' digital corporate social responsibility messages affected brand engagement more through emotional attachment, building trust, aligning values, and interactivity rather than on the basis of pure promotional benefits. These observations were in accordance with previous studies indicating that CSR molds consumers' emotional as well as cognitive response (Baskentli, Sen, Du & Bhattacharya, 2019; Pohorelov, 2024).

Digital CSR Messages and Emotional Connection

With respect to the first research objective, the results indicate that digital CSR messages were significant influencers of emotional attachment to brands by Gen Z. When a brand announces its involvement in social or environmental causes, participants would most commonly describe that brand in terms of pride and respect and relate it closely to the consumer. Attitudes toward specific issues from the CSR messages tended to cause much stronger emotional responses among participants, particularly those relating to youth issues, such as environmental protection and social equality. This supports and is consistent with previous research revealing that CSR communications enhance emotional engagement, evoking favorable attitudes and affective commitment (George, Aboobaker & Edward, 2020; Papacharalampous & Papadimitriou, 2021). As such, emotional engagement acts as the gateway to

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Print ISSN: 3006-2039

increasingly deeper brand interaction, thus reinforcing that CSR is certainly not only informational but also relational-in particular to socially conscious young consumers.

Trust, Credibility, and Authenticity in CSR Communication

The second research objective related to how digital CSR messages built trust and credibility among Gen Z consumers. The result has mentioned that trust depends on the context, therefore involving such notions as existence, transparency, and consistency. The participants said that trust could be established in those cases in which CSR messages were followed through with credible action and evidence over a long-term commitment to sustainability. On the contrary, making exaggerated claims or running CSR campaigns once in a blue moon would put doubts on the authenticity and concerns about greenwashing. Earlier literatures found that perceived authenticity and transparency are the keys in effective communication in CSR (Jung, Tian & Oh, 2024; Yu, Zhou, He & Si, 2022). Interestingly, Gen Z consumer behavior will most likely include the assessment of whether the brand's actions cohere to the messaging, consumers' judgment that companies ought to be held accountable. Distrust in CSR works also to lower engagement and even stain brand credibility; hence, ethical communication is fundamental in sustaining brand relationships.

CSR Messages as Indicators of Brand Values and Ethical Identity

Consistent with the third objective of the research, digital CSR messages succeeded at communicating brand values and ethical identity. Respondents construed CSR communication as a projection of the moral stance of the brand and its social consciousness and commitment toward communities. Also demonstrating the levels of social responsibility attached to a brand name are fairness, accountability, innovation, and compassion. They indicate the findings of the present study as substantiating earlier studies which demonstrate that CSR refers to ethical identity of the brand and have also been indicated as improving enhancing value congruency between brand and consumer (Tosun, Cagliyor & Gürce, 2024; You & Hon, 2021). Consumers having higher perception of correspondence versus values endorsed by a brand among its CSR advocates have become the most emotionalized and involved in support for such brands.

Role of Interactivity and Content Format in Enhancing Engagement

The fourth research objective examines the impact of content format and interactivity on Gen Z engagement. The visual appeal, interactivity, and cultural relevance of CSR content greatly influence engagement, as evident from the study findings. The young respondents preferred some formats over others for CSR communication; the actual groups are short videos, reels, memes, polls, and influencer-led campaigns while static posts were less popular. Such eco/given finding confirms Gen Z-like interactive and participatory media. The findings add to social media marketing-related research to show that format and interactivity are paramount in getting attention, driving behavioral engagement, and enhancing perceived relevance (Tong & Chan, 2023; ZHIYUAN & Chubotina, 2024). Interactive CSR content relates the perception that

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one participated in a cause and interfaces with a more considerable relationship that co-creates extended engagement and activation.
Implications of the Study

Theoretical Implications
The study contributes to CSR, brand engagement, and Gen Z consumer behavior literature with qualitative, consumer-centric insights. The focuses of prior researches have remained heavily quantitative; therefore, this study magnifies the emotional, ethical, and interpretative processes beneath CSR engagement. The connection made between digital CSR messages and emotional connection, trust, ethical identity, and interactivity highlight the rather complicated traction of CSR works along Gen Z consumers. It also supports and extends the previous findings on authenticity, transparency, and value congruence being relevant for engagement.
Managerial Implications
These actionable insights may hold for marketers and brand managers targeting the Generation Z consumers:
Authenticity and Evidence-Based Communications: CSR messages should be substantiated by real initiatives, measurable outcomes, and transparent reporting to curb any skepticism toward the actual reflection of the brands with which consumers engage.
Consistent and Long-Term Commitment: Sustainability in CSR programs is preferred by Gen Z consumers-in contrast to their above average expectation of occasional campaigns in their brands. The long-term relationship builds credence and loyalty with the customers.
Engaging and Digitally Friendly Content: CSR communications should be visually appealing and participatory in nature in above channels preferred by the Gen Z. It would be of tremendous help to use polls, challenges, reels, and storytelling for attention, involvement, and engagement.
Value Congruence: The values and ethical concerns of Gen Z consumers should be reflected in the CSR messages so that their belief is in congruence with the corporate responsibility.

Limitations of the Study
The present study has its own limitations, as are outlined below:
Size and Representativeness of the Sample: Eight university students were studied in the included research, which therefore restricts generalizability. According to researchers, a big and more diverse sample could help generate broader insights.

Context-Specific Outcome: The present study was confined to the Gen Z population within Pakistan. There are cultural and geographic determinants of differences in CSR perception and, thus, likely outcomes in other countries as well.

Qualitative Focus: Qualitative means have their strength but limit a more statistical generalization and testing of causality.

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Platform Bias: Given that the responses show a clear dominance by social media as a source, they may not be representative of CSR communications through other digital or offline channels.

Future Research Recommendations

Future research may take several directions towards enhancing this research in the following ways:

Mixed Methods: Qualitative insights may be incorporated to start validating and generalizing findings across larger Gen Z populations using quantitative surveys.

Comparative Cross-Cultural Studies: The vast cultural differences associated with different countries and states make it apparent that a study per country of the differences in CSR understanding and engagement could be analyzed.

Studies Exclusive to Social Media Channels: Studies directed at the facet of particular channels could be Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube, and highlight how CSR communication works differently on individual platforms.

Longitudinal Research Design: Following Gen Z engagement over time may reveal the power of continued CSR messaging in loyalty advocacy and brand perception.

Industry-Specific Studies: Evidence from studies on the effectiveness of CSR in different sectors (technology, FMCG, fashion, etc.) may offer customized insights for a brand manager.

Conclusion

This study posits that digital CSR messages exert influence upon Gen Z brand engagement through emotional connection and trust establishing, ethical sense of value communication and interactive mingling. Gen Z consumers have reacted favorably to CSR communications that are authentic, transparent, visually engaging, and aligned with their own personal values. With basses of emotional resonance, ethical credibility, and participation-oriented formats are central drivers of engagement, whereas lack thereof in timelines and priorities of execution dilute trust and reduce impact.

The study contributes to theory and practice by examining the linkages between CSR communication, consumer perception, and engagement within the context of a developing country. Practically, brands targeting Gen Z should focus on evidence-based, interactive, and value-aligned CSR to build trust, loyalty, and long-term engagement.

At the same time, although limited by generalized theories, sample size, and context, the study offers important insights about the expectations and preferences of Gen Z consumers with respect to digital CSR. Future investigations may expand upon these findings in a larger, cross-cultural context with an opportunity to derive a more

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elaborate understanding of the concepts through which CSR creates engagement, loyalty, and advocacy in the socially responsible fold among younger generations.

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