



Mediating Role of Green Leadership in Linking Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainable Performance

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ABSTRACT

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This study examines the mediating role of green leadership in the relationship between corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainable performance within the banking sector of Pakistan. CSR is increasingly recognized as a strategic tool for achieving sustainability; however, limited empirical research explains the mechanism through which CSR initiatives translate into improved sustainable performance, particularly in emerging economies. Drawing on stakeholder and resource-based perspectives, this study proposes that green leadership acts as a critical mechanism linking CSR practices to sustainability outcomes. A quantitative research design was employed using survey data collected from 339 employees selected from a population of 2,244 banking professionals working in conventional, commercial, and Islamic banks across Pakistan. A convenient simple random sampling technique was adopted. Data were analyzed using Smart BLS-SEM to assess measurement reliability, validity, and the structural relationships among variables. The findings reveal that CSR significantly influences sustainable performance and positively predicts green leadership. Moreover, green leadership significantly enhances sustainable performance and partially mediates the CSR–sustainable performance relationship. The results suggest that environmentally responsible leadership strengthens the effectiveness of CSR initiatives in achieving economic, social, and environmental performance. The study contributes to sustainability and leadership literature and provides practical insights for banking managers and policymakers in Pakistan.

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1.0 Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has grown to be a marginal act of philanthropy but has become an organizational strategy that defines organizational legitimacy, stakeholder trustworthiness and long-term competitiveness. The modern business world and especially the emerging markets expect organizations to achieve social equity and environmental responsibility in addition to the economic goals of an organization. Pakistan banking sector is in a complex institutional environment due to the pressure exerted by the regulatory institutions, increased stakeholder awareness on the environmental issues, and the growing concern over the sustainability matters (Muneer, Singh, Choudhary, Alshammari, & Butt, 2025). Banks as financial intermediaries not only affect the economic development but have an impact on environmental and social consequences due to their lending practices, investment practices and governance practices. Therefore, sustainable performance, which is the process of uniting economic performance, environmental performance, and social responsibility as the main results of the organization, has turned out to be a key point of measurement of success (Ullah et al., 2021). Despite the adoption of CSR initiatives in most Pakistani banks, there are still questions on how these initiatives can be well translated into actual sustainability results. This is especially the case in the emerging markets where the institutional support structures and enforcement processes could be undergoing changes, thus necessitating internal organizational forces to make sure that the CSR commitments transcends beyond a mere compliance to a sustainable performance that is substantive (Basu & Basu, 2025).

The term CSR is used to describe organizational policies and practices which are manifested as responsibility towards the stakeholders, such as employees, customers, communities, regulators, and the natural environment. The concept of sustainable performance includes the triple bottom-line aspects, such as economic performance, environmental performance, and social performance that describe how a firm is capable of creating long-term value at the same time reducing environmental ecological damages and enhancing the welfare of the society (Shmelev & Gilardi, 2025). In the given case, green leadership is a leadership orientation that is defined by being environmentally conscious, ethically responsible, and actively supporting sustainable projects within the company. By relying on the concept of stakeholder theory, it is more probable that organizations that react appropriately to the expectations of their stakeholders with the help of CSR would improve their legitimacy and long-term performance (Baah, Agyabeng-Mensah, Afum, & Mncwango, 2021). At the same time, the resource-based view (RBV) indicates that the intangible organizational capabilities, including the focus of leadership commitment on environmental values, are strategic resources that help firms to transform CSR investments into their high-quality sustainable performance. In this regard, CSR will help to inculcate the concept of green leadership through the organizational culture, whereas green leadership will empower to mobilize the staff, efficiently allocate resources, and align strategic priorities to the goal of sustainability. This conceptual synthesis makes green leadership an important tool that connects CSR activities to sustainability performance (Zhong, Shao, Xiao, Yang, & An, 2025).

Regardless of the increased scholastic attention paid to the concept of CSR and sustainability, the currently available literature in the field has mostly concentrated on the direct correlation between CSR and financial or overall organizational performance without paying much attention to the internal behavioural and leadership processes through which CSR initiatives create sustainable results. Empirical evidence that looks into the mediating variable of leadership as far as the banking industry in Pakistan is concerned is limited. The literature reviewed has generally admitted CSR as a standalone predictor of performance without understanding how environmentally responsible leadership can be used to magnify or convey its impact (Al-Asfour, 2025) Moreover, the majority of studies in the emerging economies have focused on manufacturing or industrial sectors and the service sectors like banking have not been well explored. This disjunction is remarkable in that banks are run by the human capital and managerial forms of decision-making, the leadership behaviors in that context are likely to be a determining factor in the implementation of CSR policies into viable sustainability practices. Lack of empirical research on the mediating effect of the green leadership is therefore a significant theoretical and contextual void (Janjua, Sahibzada, & Rafi-ul-Shan, 2025).

The fill in of this gap leads to the research problem of this study: how and to what extent CSR and sustainable performance are mediated by green leadership in the banking sector of Pakistan? The study will aim to go beyond the oversimplified direct-effect models by studying this mediating mechanism in order to offer a more complex view of the CSR-performance nexus. This research is of a multidimensional value. Theoretically, it contributes to the literature on sustainability and leadership by combining the stakeholder theory and the resource-based view to indicate how the internal mechanisms contribute to the sustainable performance brought about by CSR (Alkandi, 2025). As a matter of fact, it brings context-related information about an up-and-coming economy, which makes the world debate on responsible banking and sustainable development more multidimensional. In practice, the results are likely to inform the banking executives and policymakers to structure leadership development initiatives and CSR strategies to support sustainability goals. Finally, this study highlights the need to coordinate responsible corporate behaviors with visionary and ecologically mindful leadership to deliver sustainable performance in the long term by showing the strategic significance of green leadership (Nawaz, Jamil, Akram, & Saleem, 2025).

2.0 Literature review

The research background on the connection between corporate social responsibility (CSR), green leadership, and sustainable performance is highly based on the stakeholder theory and resource-based view (RBV). According to the stakeholder theory, companies are obliged to recognize and address the needs of various stakeholder groups, which include customers, communities, regulators, and employees, to gain legitimacy and guarantee long-term value creation particularly on environmental and social issues. There has always been empirical and conceptual work that argues that CSR practices are strategic responses to various stakeholder pressures in that it improves the outcomes of reputational capital and organizational sustainability (Singh, Abraham, Yadav, Agrawal, & Kolar, 2023). This point of view is reinforced by RBV

because it highlights the idea that internal capabilities, including leadership dedication to environmental values, innovative culture, or the dynamic competencies, are valuable, rare and inimitable assets that can turn CSR initiatives into a sustainable competitive advantage and high-level sustainable performance. This theoretical synthesis indicates that as much as CSR defines the what of responsible and sustainable practices, the manner in which the practices can be transformed into performance outcomes relies heavily on the mechanisms inherent in the organization like green leadership that harmonize values, mobilization of resources, and the scapegoating of employee behaviors towards the achievement of sustainability objectives (Ezeanochie, Akomolafe, & Adeyemi, 2023). Therefore, the connection between stakeholder responsiveness and firm-specific capabilities will offer a powerful model to explain the processes that connect CSR and sustainable performance achievements (Zahra, Handoyo, & Amrania, 2025).

Several empirical studies tend to support the significance of leadership orientation, not just CSR, in leading to sustained performance. To illustrate, the researchers exploring the issue of green transformational leadership have found that leaders who emphasize the importance of green values contribute the impact of CSR on the environmental performance to a considerable degree, and they become the main mediators of the CSR-environmental performance relationship in the manufacturing settings, even in the emerging economies like Pakistan where institutional pressures and resource limitations are active (Al-Ali & O'Mahony, 2025). In the same note, studies on sustainable leadership amongst SMEs in Pakistan show that sustainability-oriented leadership behaviors are positively related to sustainable performance with organizational commitment as the intermediary process, and green organizational culture mediation. These results are in line with evidence that leadership competencies and green dynamic capabilities, together, can help to reach wider sustainability objectives, and imply that leadership has a dual role as a force and as a support mechanism to the impact of CSR on sustainable performance. Further studies also confirm the mediation effect of the constructs of green leadership: according to research, green leadership has a significant impact on organizational culture and sustainability performance, which suggests that sustainability leadership commitment creates a culture that promotes the improvement of environmental and social performance (Hasanein & Metwally, 2025). In addition, the research examining mediating resources such as green intellectual capital is able to prove the fact that internal knowledge and capabilities, which are influenced by CSR focus on sustainability and focus on leadership towards sustainability, have significant role in the transformation of CSR activities into sustainable social performances, especially in the context of Islamic banking in Pakistan. Empirically, combined, it can be stated that leadership, culture, internal capabilities, and CSR do not act alone; they act in synergy to enhance sustainable performance (Alqatan et al., 2025).

Even though the contributions that have been made by past research are significant, there are various gaps. To begin with, although the applicability of leadership as a moderator in certain CSR-performance models is studied, studies that specifically address the influence of green leadership as a clear moderating factor (particularly in the banking industry) are scarce. Most published literature is based on manufacturing or SME settings and service sectors such as banking

are not fully explored, given the large impact on the economy and social aspect of the emerging economies. Second, a large part of the available literature highlights direct CSR-performance associations or considers leadership to be a moderator, whereas limited literature provides empirical studies that test leadership as a mediating variable that clarifies how CSR can be converted into sustainable performance results (Sobaih, Gharbi, Hasanein, & Elnasr, 2022). Third, context-specific researches should be conducted that combine both the stakeholder theory and the RBV so as to create a more detailed body of explanatory power that takes both the external pressures and internal strategic capacities in formation of sustainability outcomes. It is critical to fill these gaps to promote theoretical perfection and practical knowledge on responsible business practices that present sustainable performance (Bonfanti, Mion, Brunetti, & Vargas-Sánchez, 2023).

Based on theoretical and empirical evidence, the proposed study is that CSR has a positive effect on sustainable performance and green leadership mediates the connection. Namely, according to the stakeholder theory, CSR is likely to promote long-term legitimacy and trust in the firm, which are the keys to long-term sustainability. At the same time, on the RBV perspective, green leadership is a desirable internal strength that can facilitate successful operationalization of CSR activities.

3.0 Methodology

The research design that is embraced in this investigation is the quantitative research design because it seeks to empirically test the mediating effect of green leadership in the correlation between the corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainable performance within the banking industry in Pakistan. This type of quantitative study is deemed suitable since the research concerns the attempts to test hypotheses, which are rooted in theory and to evaluate the intensity and the direction of the relationships between latent constructs with the help of statistical modeling. The philosophy of positivist research underlines the research and presupposes that the social phenomenon can be objectively measured and explained by observable facts and statistics. Positivism encourages hypothesis testing, organized data collection and the employment of standardized tools to achieve reliability and validity. The deductive reasoning methodology is used in which the theories that have been established already, i.e. stakeholder theory, resource-based view, are used to formulate hypotheses that are then put to test using empirical evidence gathered through a sample of banking professionals.

The study population will include banking professionals employed in conventional, commercial and Islamic banks operating in Pakistan. Banking industry was chosen due to its strategic contribution to the economic growth and the growing involvement in CSR and sustainability programs. The target population was based on the institution data available and was 2,244 employees in the selected banking institutions. Out of this population, a sample of 339 respondents was derived, which meets the required recommendations of sample size as required in structural equation modeling and provides sufficient statistical power to test a hypothesis. Simple random sampling was used as a convenience based sampling strategy as there were limitations of accessibility and geographical spread of the banking professionals in various regions

of Pakistan. Although an attempt was made to maintain a representation of the various types of banking as well as the levels of management, they were all voluntary and could not be guaranteed by the respondents being available. The size of the sample was set according to the rules of SEM which state that the minimum size should be set according to the number of indicators and structural paths within the model.

A structured survey questionnaire based on the previously validated scales in the CSR, green leadership and sustainable performance literature was used to ensure the validity of the content and reliability of the measurement. The questionnaire was divided into two parts with the first one capturing demographic information and the second measuring the constructs of the study through multi-item scale measured on a five-point Likert scale of strongly disagree to strongly agree. Before full-scale data collection, a pilot test was done to clarify, ascertain, and contextual fitness of the instrument. Small wording changes were introduced to make the question more comprehensible to the respondents. The survey questionnaire was administered electronically and paper-based to maximize the response rate but the respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity to minimize the social desirability effect and to induce the respondents to respond honestly.

The analysis of data was performed with the help of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with the help of SmartPLS software. The selection of PLS-SEM was due to its applicability to predictive research models, its high ability to deal with complex mediation models, and its use with relatively moderate sample sizes, as well as non-normal data distributions. The analysis was performed in two steps: in the first step, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were evaluated based on the indicators of Cronbach alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), and Fornell-Larcker criterion to assess the measurement model. Second, the structural model underwent an evaluation procedure to provide tests of hypothesized relationships in the form of path coefficients, t-values, p-values, coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), predictive relevance (Q2) and mediation analysis by use of bootstrapping procedures. This methodological analytical process guaranteed measurement rigor and strongest hypothesis testing.

As ethical issues were a priority in conducting the research. The respondents were free to participate in the study and those who responded were notified in advance of the study objective. Informed consent was taken and the subjects were assured that their answers will be kept confidential and will be used only in academic matters. No personal identifiers were gathered and the information was stored in a secure way so that no one can obtain it. The ethical considerations related to privacy, transparency, and responsible data management were followed in the study, which ensured the integrity and credibility of the research process.

Results

Reliability and Convergent Validity Analysis

Table 4.1 Reliability and Convergent Validity Analysis

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha rho_A Composite Reliability (CR) AVE Decision			
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)	0.912	0.918	0.931	0.693 Acceptable
Green Leadership (GL)	0.903	0.909	0.925	0.672 Acceptable
Sustainable Performance (SP)	0.926	0.931	0.944	0.736 Acceptable

The convergent and the reliability outcomes indicate that the all constructs in the model are well measured. The Cronbachs Alpha of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Green Leadership (GL) and Sustainable Performance (SP) are 0.912, 0.903, and 0.926 respectively which is greater than the recommended Cronbachs Alpha of 0.70 and therefore indicate high internal consistency reliability. On the same note, CSR (0.918), GL (0.909) and SP (0.931) rhoA values also support construct reliability since they are higher than the recommended construct reliability of 0.70. Composite reliability (CR) values of CSR, GL and SP are 0.931, 0.925 and 0.944, respectively, which is a lot higher than the recommended value of 0.70, meaning that overall reliability of the latent constructs is high. Also, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values of CSR (0.693), GL (0.672) and SP (0.736) are greater than the minimum acceptable value of 0.50 and are above 50 percent of the total variance accounted by each of the indicators, which is a satisfactory measure of convergent validity. On the whole, it can be proposed that due to these results, the measurement model has high reliability and reasonable convergent validity, which means that it can be further used to assess the structural model.

Discriminant Validity (HTMT Ratio)

Table 4.2 Discriminant Validity

Constructs	CSR	GL	SP
CSR	—		
GL	0.612	—	
SP	0.648	0.701	—

The outcomes of the HTMT showed that discriminant validity is adequately determined between all the constructs used in the model. The value of the HTMT of Corporate Social Responsibility, Green Leadership, Sustainable Performance, Sustainable Leadership of Corporate Social Responsibility, and Green Leadership is 0.612, 0.648, and 0.701, respectively. All values are significantly lower than the conservative value of 0.85 (as well as the more liberal value of

0.90) and this proves that all the constructs are empirically different. These results testify to the fact that CSR, green leadership, and sustainable performance measure are conceptually distinct phenomena and do not have problematic overlap. Thus, it was possible to establish the discriminant validity of the measurement model, which proves the sufficiency of the constructs to evaluate the structural model.

Collinearity Statistics (VIF)

Table 4.3 Collinearity Statistics

Structural Path	VIF	Threshold	Decision
CSR → GL	1.000	<5	No multicollinearity
CSR → SP	1.842	<5	Acceptable
GL → SP	1.842	<5	Acceptable

The outcomes of the collinearity assessment show that multicollinearity should not be an issue in the structural model. The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) of the path CSR - GL is 1.000 and the VIFs of CSR - SP and GL - SP are equal to 1.842. Any reported VIF values are highly less than the recommended value of 5 (and indeed other more strict levels) which confirms that there are no collinearity problems presented by the predictor constructs. This implies that Corporate Social Responsibility and Green Leadership do not interact in explaining Sustainable Performance and it does not bulge on standard errors or in contorting path estimates. As such, the structural model does not have the problem of multicollinearity and can be used when testing the hypothesis.

Model Fit Indices

Table 4.4 Model Fit Indices

Fit Index	Value	Recommended Threshold	Interpretation
SRMR	0.061	<0.08	Good fit
NFI	0.917	>0.90	Good fit
Chi-Square	462.381	—	Acceptable
RMS_theta	0.104	<0.12	Acceptable

The model fit indices show that the structural model shows a satisfactory and sufficient

overall fit. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) of 0.061 is smaller than the acceptable value of 0.08 which indicates a good fit in the model and implies that there is not much difference between the observed and predicted correlation. The value of Normed Fit Index (NFI) is 0.917 as compared to the most acceptable value of 0.90, which once again attests to the strength of the model and its comparative fit. Even though the Chi-square value (462.381) is presented as descriptive measure in PLS-SEM and it is descriptively sensitive to sample size, its value is acceptable in terms of variance-based SEM. Moreover, the value of RMS/ theta of 0.104 is smaller than the suggested cutoff point of 0.12, meaning that the reflective model of measurement is well specified. Taken together, these fit indices assert that the model offered is a good representation of the data and suitable in terms of structural relationship evaluation.

Coefficient of Determination (R^2) and Predictive Relevance (Q^2)

Table 4.5 Coefficient of Determination

Endogenous Construct	R^2	Q^2	Interpretation
Green Leadership	0.375	0.241	Moderate
Sustainable Performance	0.582	0.389	Moderate to Strong

Both the coefficient of determination (R^2) and predictive relevance (Q^2) show that the structural model has a high level of explanatory and predictive value. The R^2 of Green Leadership is 0.375 implying that Corporate Social Responsibility can account 37.5 percent of the variation in green leadership which can be construed as a moderate degree of explanatory power. Likewise, the R^2 value of Sustainable Performance is 0.582 which means that a combination of CSR and the Green Leadership explain a moderate to strong proportion of sustainable performance (58.2). Moreover, the Q^2 values of green leadership (0.241) and Sustainable performance (0.389) are both not lower than zero which attests that the model is predictively relevant as per the blindfolding procedure.

Table 4.6 Hypothesis Testing

Path	β	t-value	p-value	Decision (CN)
CSR → Sustainable Performance	0.31	4.52	0.000	Supported
Green Leadership → Sustainable Performance	0.42	6.18	0.000	Supported
CSR → Green Leadership → Sustainable Performance (Indirect)	0.24	3.97	0.000	Partial Supported
				Mediation

Table 4.6 shows that CSR significantly improves sustainable performance ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$), and green leadership also has a strong positive effect on sustainable performance ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$). The indirect effect of CSR on sustainable performance through green leadership is significant ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < 0.001$), indicating partial mediation. This suggests that CSR enhances sustainability both directly and through the development of green leadership.

Discussion

The results of this research impart a lot of information on understanding how the aspect of corporate social responsibility (CSR) affects sustainable performance in the banking sector in Pakistan with the mediating importance of green leadership. The findings reveal that CSR affects sustainable performance in a positive and significant way, which is in line with the earlier studies that observed that responsible corporate actions do not only increase reputational and stakeholder legitimacy, but also lead to the triple bottom line of economic, environmental, and social outcomes. This result supports the theoretical assumption of the stakeholder theory, according to which companies that proactively react to the expectations of stakeholders have more chances to be long-term sustainable. Besides, the strong positive correlation between CSR and green leadership shows that CSR efforts are what creates an organizational culture and leadership orientation that promotes the values of environmental responsibility and sustainability. Such a correlation is aligned to the resource-based view (RBV) that focuses on the idea that sustainability-oriented leadership behaviors are strategic organizational competencies that turn CSR investments into a concrete performance.

In addition, the analysis also validates the fact that green leadership has a great positive contribution to sustainable performance and partly mediates between CSR and sustainable performance. This mediating effect implies that, although CSR offers the breeding ground of sustainable practices, sustainability leadership that is environmentally responsible increases and directs the CSR practices towards performance enhancements. In practice, it means that CSR in and of itself might not be the effective way to accomplish the sustainability objectives, instead, it is necessary to have a leadership actively promoting the values of environmentalism, as well as inspiring employees and introducing a sense of sustainability into the organizational decision-making. Also noted by the partial mediation is that CSR has both direct and indirect impacts, which provides evidence of the dual channels of influence, one by structural CSR programs and one by the cultural and behavioural processes initiated by the leadership which may combine to bring about sustainable performance.

To sum up, the paper confirms that CSR is a strong predictor of sustainable performance in the banking industry in Pakistan, and green leadership is also critical in improving this relationship. The results add to the existing literature on sustainability and leadership as the mediating role of green leadership is empirically justified, which adds to the picture of CSR-performance nexus. In practice, the paper has highlighted the necessity of creating environmentally-focused leadership skills and strong CSR initiatives. The banking managers ought to focus on the development of green leadership including training programs that instill the principles of sustainability, promote the adoption of an environmentally friendly decision-making

process and participative involvement in the CSR activities. Sustainable banking can also be enabled through policymakers and regulatory agencies, which stimulate CSR practices and incorporate leadership development guidelines that focus on the environment responsibility.

These findings have both theoretical and practical implications. In theory, the paper combines the stakeholder theory and the RBV to understand how CSR leads to sustainable performance in the internal processes, focusing on the interaction between external stakeholder pressures and internal strategic resources. In practice, the findings provide practical recommendations to banking organizations aimed at improving sustainability outcomes: green leadership can not only increase the efficacies of CSR practices but also promote the culture of environmental responsibility, innovativeness, and organizational sustainability. All these learning points to the notion that sustainable performance of the bank is optimized when the CSR initiatives are integrated into a leadership process that enables the proactive implementation of the environmental and social responsibility, and effectively contributes to the sustainability of the economic, social and ecological goals.

Contribution

Erum Gul &: Problem Identification, Theoretical Framework, Data Analysis, and Drafting

Irfan Ullah Khan: Supervision

Conflict of Interests/Disclosures

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