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Compensation Fairness And Employee Recognition With Organizational Commitment Mediation On Brand Reputation Development

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how compensation fairness and employee recognition influence brand reputation development through organizational commitment among MSMEs in Purwakarta. Using a quantitative survey of 372 employees and PLS-SEM analysis, the results indicate that compensation fairness and employee recognition both exert significant positive effects on organizational commitment. Organizational commitment, in turn, has a strong positive impact on brand reputation development, confirming its central mediating role. The indirect effects of compensation fairness and employee recognition on brand reputation through commitment are also statistically significant, demonstrating that internal reward perceptions translate into external brand outcomes via employees' psychological attachment. These findings highlight that material and symbolic rewards operate as complementary mechanisms in shaping employee loyalty and brand-supportive behavior. From a theoretical perspective, the study extends fairness-based explanations by integrating organizational commitment as a key process linking human resource practices to branding consequences. Practically, the results suggest that MSMEs can strengthen their reputation by ensuring transparent and equitable compensation while simultaneously institutionalizing simple but consistent recognition practices. Such strategies are particularly relevant in resource-constrained contexts where formal branding investments are limited. Overall, the study emphasizes that sustainable brand reputation begins with internal justice and acknowledgment for local MSMEs.

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Kata Kunci:
Reputasi Merek
Keadilan Kompensasi
Pengakuan Karyawan
Komitmen Organisasi

ABSTRACT

Studi ini meneliti bagaimana keadilan kompensasi dan pengakuan karyawan memengaruhi pengembangan reputasi merek melalui komitmen organisasi di

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antara UMKM di Purwakarta. Menggunakan survei kuantitatif terhadap 372 karyawan dan analisis PLS-SEM, hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa keadilan kompensasi dan pengakuan karyawan sama-sama memberikan pengaruh positif yang signifikan terhadap komitmen organisasi. Komitmen organisasi, pada gilirannya, memiliki dampak positif yang kuat terhadap pengembangan reputasi merek, yang menegaskan peran mediasi sentralnya. Pengaruh tidak langsung dari keadilan kompensasi dan pengakuan karyawan terhadap reputasi merek melalui komitmen juga signifikan secara statistik, menunjukkan bahwa persepsi penghargaan internal diterjemahkan menjadi hasil merek eksternal melalui keterikatan psikologis karyawan. Temuan ini menyoroti bahwa penghargaan material dan simbolis beroperasi sebagai mekanisme komplementer dalam membentuk loyalitas karyawan dan perilaku yang mendukung merek. Dari perspektif teoretis, studi ini memperluas penjelasan berbasis keadilan dengan mengintegrasikan komitmen organisasi sebagai proses kunci yang menghubungkan praktik sumber daya manusia dengan konsekuensi branding. Secara praktis, hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa UMKM dapat memperkuat reputasi mereka dengan memastikan kompensasi yang transparan dan adil sekaligus melembagakan praktik pengakuan yang sederhana namun konsisten. Strategi tersebut sangat relevan dalam konteks yang terbatas sumber daya di mana investasi branding formal terbatas. Secara keseluruhan, studi ini menekankan bahwa reputasi merek yang berkelanjutan dimulai dengan keadilan internal dan pengakuan terhadap UMKM lokal.

INTRODUCTION

Compensation fairness and employee recognition are increasingly debated as core drivers of employee attitudes and corporate outcomes in contemporary organizations. Many firms still struggle to align pay systems with transparent performance criteria, creating perceptions of inequity that weaken trust in management (Colquitt et al., 2021). Recognition programs are often implemented symbolically, without being integrated into a broader human resource strategy, which limits their motivational impact. When employees perceive that rewards are distributed inconsistently, their emotional attachment to the organization declines (Kuvaas et al., 2020). This condition becomes more problematic when organizations attempt to project a strong employer image while internal practices remain contested. The inconsistency between internal fairness and external branding creates reputational risks that are difficult to repair. Scholars argue that reputation begins with internal stakeholders before it reaches customers and investors (Helm et al., 2021). Thus, unresolved issues in compensation fairness and recognition practices represent a critical managerial and scholarly problem (Helm et al., 2021).

Recent empirical evidence illustrates that dissatisfaction with compensation and lack of recognition remain widespread in many sectors. Large-scale workforce studies indicate that a significant proportion of employees feel underappreciated despite meeting performance expectations, which weakens their willingness to advocate for their organizations (Harter et al., 2020). Recognition is strongly associated with daily work engagement, especially in service and knowledge-based industries (Nazir et al., 2021). At the same time, perceived pay fairness has been linked to reduced turnover intentions and higher discretionary effort (Shin et al., 2022). These patterns suggest that tangible and symbolic rewards jointly shape employee perceptions of organizational support. In practice, however, companies often prioritize financial incentives while neglecting structured recognition systems. This imbalance contributes to fragile employee–organization relationships and inconsistent employer branding. When employees disengage, negative word of mouth can spread rapidly through digital platforms (Chun, 2020). Consequently, observable workplace phenomena indicate that internal reward systems are directly connected to external brand reputation (Chun, 2020).

Despite growing attention to these issues, prior research tends to examine compensation fairness and recognition as separate predictors of employee outcomes. For instance, Xiong et al. (2022) demonstrated that pay fairness improves organizational commitment, yet their model did not incorporate recognition as a complementary mechanism. Other studies focus on recognition and engagement without considering fairness perceptions

in reward allocation (Nazir et al., 2021). This fragmented approach limits understanding of how different reward dimensions jointly influence strategic outcomes. Moreover, organizational commitment is often treated as an outcome variable rather than as a mediating process. Such designs overlook the possibility that commitment translates internal practices into external organizational value. The absence of an integrated framework leaves uncertainty about how reward perceptions are converted into brand reputation. Addressing this gap requires combining fairness and recognition in a single explanatory model. Therefore, there is a clear need for research that positions organizational commitment as a mediator between reward practices and brand reputation development (Xiong et al., 2022).

This study is grounded in Fairness Heuristic Theory, which explains how individuals rely on fairness cues to decide whether to trust authorities and institutions. The theory suggests that employees use compensation fairness and recognition signals to evaluate the organization's intentions and reliability (Van den Bos et al., 2019). Rather than calculating objective outcomes, they form quick judgments based on perceived justice and respect. These judgments shape long-term attitudes, including loyalty and commitment. Fairness Heuristic Theory is particularly suitable because it links micro-level perceptions to macro-level organizational consequences. It also explains why symbolic rewards such as recognition can compensate for material limitations when fairness is evident. By focusing on heuristic judgments, the theory clarifies how employees translate reward practices into organizational attachment. This perspective is more specific than broad motivational theories and better captures the cognitive shortcuts employees use in daily work life (Van den Bos et al., 2019).

The urgency of this research is reinforced by the competitive environment in which employer reputation has become a strategic asset. Organizations increasingly compete not only for customers but also for skilled labor in tight job markets (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2020). Digital transparency allows employees to publicly evaluate their organizations, amplifying the impact of internal practices on external perceptions. In such conditions, unfair compensation or weak recognition systems can rapidly damage brand credibility. Studies show that employees' internal evaluations strongly influence corporate reputation scores and employer attractiveness (Walsh et al., 2019). Companies that fail to manage internal fairness risk losing both talent and market trust. This makes reward management a strategic rather than purely administrative issue. Research that connects reward practices with brand reputation therefore addresses a pressing managerial challenge. Understanding this linkage is essential for sustaining competitive advantage in reputationally sensitive industries (Walsh et al., 2019).

At the organizational level, commitment serves as a psychological bridge between internal policies and external brand signals. Employees with strong commitment are more likely to act as brand ambassadors and defend organizational image (Meyer et al., 2020). Commitment transforms personal satisfaction into collective identity, strengthening consistency between what firms promise and what they practice. When compensation is perceived as fair, commitment increases because employees feel valued and secure. Recognition further reinforces this bond by fulfilling socio-emotional needs (Rai et al., 2021). Without commitment, even well-designed reward systems may fail to produce reputational benefits. This implies that managerial efforts should focus not only on rewards themselves but also on the relational outcomes they generate. A mediated model clarifies why some organizations gain reputational returns from reward investments while others do not. Hence, examining commitment as an intervening mechanism is both theoretically and practically important (Meyer et al., 2020).

The specific objective of this study is to analyze the effect of compensation fairness on organizational commitment and brand reputation development. Prior studies suggest that fair pay enhances trust and reduces cynicism toward management (Shin et al., 2022). By linking fairness perceptions to reputation outcomes, this research extends existing models beyond individual-level attitudes. It also evaluates whether commitment explains how fairness perceptions influence brand-related evaluations. Such analysis contributes to a more nuanced understanding of internal branding processes. Empirical evidence on this pathway remains limited, especially in integrated models. Clarifying this relationship can guide organizations in designing equitable compensation systems that support long-term brand value. This objective responds directly to calls for multilevel approaches in human resource and branding research (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2020).

Another objective is to examine how employee recognition interacts with compensation fairness through organizational commitment to shape brand reputation. Recognition has been shown to strengthen emotional attachment when employees feel respected and visible (Rai et al., 2021). Integrating recognition with fairness allows for a more holistic view of reward systems. This study seeks to determine whether recognition amplifies the reputational impact of fair compensation by deepening commitment. It also aims to identify whether commitment serves as a consistent

mediator across different reward dimensions. By doing so, the research contributes to theory development in organizational behavior and strategic branding. The findings are expected to inform managers about the combined value of tangible and intangible rewards. Ultimately, the study aspires to demonstrate that brand reputation begins with internal justice and acknowledgment practices (Rai et al., 2021).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Fairness Heuristic Theory

Fairness Heuristic Theory explains how individuals rely on fairness-related cues to evaluate authority figures and organizational systems under conditions of uncertainty. The theory proposes that employees do not always calculate outcomes rationally but instead use perceptions of justice and respect as shortcuts for deciding whether an organization can be trusted (Van den Bos et al., 2019). These fairness judgments emerge from experiences with reward allocation, interpersonal treatment, and recognition practices. Rather than focusing solely on material outcomes, individuals interpret fairness as a signal of moral intent and organizational integrity. This interpretation shapes their emotional and behavioral reactions toward the organization. When fairness cues are positive, employees assume that future interactions will also be fair. Consequently, fairness perceptions become a cognitive anchor in forming organizational attitudes (Van den Bos et al., 2019).

The development of Fairness Heuristic Theory has expanded from a narrow focus on procedural justice to a broader understanding of social and symbolic cues. Recent studies emphasize that fairness judgments operate especially strongly in contexts characterized by power imbalance and ambiguity, such as employment relationships (De Cremer et al., 2020). The theory has been applied to explain trust formation, compliance, and long-term commitment in organizational settings. It has also evolved to incorporate emotional reactions, showing that fairness heuristics are not purely cognitive but also affective. Empirical evidence indicates that fairness perceptions stabilize employee expectations about organizational behavior (Skarlicki et al., 2020). Over time, this stabilizing function reduces uncertainty and fosters identification with the organization. The theory thus moves beyond short-term reactions and explains durable employee–organization bonds (De Cremer et al., 2020).

In relation to this study, Fairness Heuristic Theory provides a logical foundation for linking compensation fairness and employee recognition with organizational commitment and brand reputation development. Employees use fairness cues from reward systems to decide whether the organization deserves loyalty and advocacy (Van den Bos et al., 2019). When compensation and recognition are perceived as fair, employees infer that the organization values them genuinely. This inference strengthens psychological attachment and motivates supportive behaviors toward the organization. Such behaviors include positive word of mouth and brand-supportive actions that contribute to reputation. The theory therefore clarifies how internal reward practices translate into external brand outcomes. It also explains why organizational commitment can function as a mediating mechanism between reward perceptions and brand reputation. Hence, Fairness Heuristic Theory offers a specific and suitable lens for examining the proposed relationships (Skarlicki et al., 2020).

Compensation Fairness

Compensation fairness refers to employees' perceptions of equity and justice in the distribution and determination of pay and benefits. It involves both distributive fairness, which concerns outcome equity, and procedural fairness, which concerns how pay decisions are made (Shin et al., 2022). Employees assess fairness by comparing their inputs and outcomes with those of others in similar roles. These comparisons shape whether pay is viewed as deserved and legitimate. Compensation fairness is not limited to salary level but includes transparency, consistency, and rational justification. When fairness is perceived, employees are more likely to accept pay differences and organizational policies. Thus, compensation fairness functions as a key evaluative signal in employment relationships (Shin et al., 2022).

From the perspective of Fairness Heuristic Theory, compensation fairness provides a primary cue for judging organizational trustworthiness. Employees use pay decisions as concrete indicators of how much the organization values their contributions (Van den Bos et al., 2019). When compensation is perceived as fair, employees infer benevolent intent and predict stable future treatment. This inference reduces uncertainty and strengthens emotional attachment. Conversely, unfair pay signals potential exploitation and weakens loyalty. Fairness heuristics operate especially strongly in compensation contexts because pay is directly linked to survival and status. Therefore, compensation fairness plays a central role in shaping commitment through heuristic judgments (De Cremer et al., 2020).

Empirical studies support the link between compensation fairness and organizational commitment. Shin et al. (2022) found that perceived pay fairness significantly increases affective commitment by reinforcing trust in management. Similarly, Qureshi et al. (2021) reported that

employees who perceive equitable compensation show stronger loyalty and lower withdrawal intentions. These findings suggest that fairness in pay systems builds psychological bonds with the organization. Commitment derived from fair compensation also predicts supportive behaviors toward the organization. Such evidence provides a strong basis for proposing that compensation fairness influences organizational commitment, which in turn contributes to brand reputation development (Qureshi et al., 2021).

Hypothesis 1: Compensation fairness has a positive effect on organizational commitment.
Hypothesis 2: Organizational commitment mediates the relationship between compensation fairness and brand reputation development.

Employee Recognition

Employee recognition refers to non-monetary acknowledgment of employees' efforts, achievements, and contributions within the organization. It includes verbal praise, awards, and symbolic gestures that signal appreciation (Rai et al., 2021). Recognition fulfills socio-emotional needs such as respect and belonging. Unlike compensation, recognition focuses on meaning rather than material value. Employees interpret recognition as evidence that their work is visible and valued. This interpretation influences self-worth and motivation. Recognition therefore represents an important psychological resource in modern organizations (Rai et al., 2021).

Within Fairness Heuristic Theory, recognition operates as a symbolic fairness cue that communicates interpersonal respect. Employees use recognition to infer whether the organization treats them with dignity and moral consideration (Van den Bos et al., 2019). Even when material rewards are limited, fair and consistent recognition can signal benevolent intent. This signal supports trust and reduces uncertainty about organizational motives. Recognition thus functions as a heuristic indicator of fairness at the relational level. When recognition is absent or biased, employees infer unfairness and question organizational values. Consequently, recognition directly shapes commitment through fairness-based judgments (Skarlicki et al., 2020).

Prior studies demonstrate that recognition enhances organizational commitment and positive organizational behaviors. Rai et al. (2021) showed that recognition strengthens emotional attachment by reinforcing perceived organizational support. Similarly, Kim and Beehr (2022) found that recognition practices increase loyalty and willingness to promote the organization externally. These results suggest that recognition is not merely motivational but also relational. Commitment generated through recognition encourages employees to defend and promote the organization's image. This provides a rationale for linking recognition with brand reputation through organizational commitment (Kim & Beehr, 2022).

Hypothesis 3: Employee recognition has a positive effect on organizational commitment.
Hypothesis 4: Organizational commitment mediates the relationship between employee recognition and brand reputation development.

Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment is defined as a psychological state reflecting an employee's emotional attachment, identification, and involvement with the organization. It represents a stable orientation toward remaining with and supporting the organization (Meyer et al., 2020). Commitment includes affective components such as pride and belonging, as well as normative feelings of obligation. Employees with high commitment perceive organizational success as personally meaningful. This bond goes beyond contractual obligations and reflects internalized values. Commitment therefore acts as a bridge between individual perceptions and organizational outcomes (Meyer et al., 2020).

From the lens of Fairness Heuristic Theory, commitment emerges as a long-term consequence of fairness-based judgments. When employees infer that the organization is fair and respectful, they feel safe to invest emotionally (Van den Bos et al., 2019). This emotional investment evolves into commitment as uncertainty is reduced and trust is strengthened. Commitment thus reflects accumulated heuristic evaluations of organizational treatment. It is not merely a reaction to single events but a product of repeated fairness cues. Hence, fairness in compensation and recognition serves as an antecedent of commitment in this framework (De Cremer et al., 2020).

Previous research confirms the role of commitment as a mediator between HR practices and organizational outcomes. Meyer et al. (2020) demonstrated that commitment transmits the effects of reward practices to performance and citizenship behavior. Similarly, Nguyen et al. (2021) found that commitment explains how perceived organizational support influences corporate image. These findings indicate that commitment converts internal experiences into outward-oriented behaviors. Employees who are committed are more likely to speak positively about their organization and act as informal brand ambassadors. This supports the mediating role of commitment between reward fairness, recognition, and brand reputation development (Nguyen et al., 2021).

Hypothesis 5: Organizational commitment has a positive effect on brand reputation development.

Brand Reputation Development

Brand reputation development refers to the process by which stakeholders form stable and favorable evaluations of an organization's credibility, reliability, and values over time. It is shaped by both external communication and internal organizational practices (Chun, 2020). Reputation reflects cumulative judgments rather than short-term impressions. Employees play a crucial role because they experience organizational reality directly. Their behaviors and narratives influence how outsiders perceive the brand. Thus, brand reputation is partly constructed from internal social processes (Chun, 2020).

According to Fairness Heuristic Theory, brand reputation can be viewed as an external reflection of internal fairness judgments. When employees perceive fairness, they are more likely to trust the organization and communicate positive signals to external audiences (Van den Bos et al., 2019). These signals include service quality, advocacy, and online reviews. Fairness-based commitment motivates employees to align their behavior with brand promises. Over time, consistent internal fairness cues produce stable external reputational outcomes. This theoretical link clarifies why reward practices can influence brand reputation indirectly through commitment (Skarlicki et al., 2020).

Empirical studies show that employee attitudes significantly predict corporate reputation. Chun (2020) found that internal trust and pride strongly influence external reputation rankings. Similarly, Walsh et al. (2019) reported that employees' commitment and identification explain variations in perceived brand credibility. These studies suggest that reputation is not only a marketing construct but also a human resource outcome. When employees feel fairly treated and recognized, they support the brand more actively. This supports the proposed model in which compensation fairness and recognition affect reputation through organizational commitment (Walsh et al., 2019).

Hypothesis 6: Compensation fairness and employee recognition indirectly influence brand reputation development through organizational commitment.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study applies a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design to test the relationships between compensation fairness, employee recognition, organizational commitment, and brand reputation development. The research uses a cross-sectional survey method to collect primary data from employees of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in Purwakarta, Indonesia. This design is appropriate because it allows the examination of causal relationships among variables within a single period of observation. The unit of analysis is individual employees working in MSMEs, while the unit of observation is their perception of reward practices, commitment, and brand reputation. Data are analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with a partial least squares approach (PLS-SEM), which is suitable for predictive models and complex mediation structures.

Population and Sample

The population of this study consists of all employees working in MSMEs located in Purwakarta Regency. Based on data from the local Department of Cooperatives and MSMEs, the estimated number of active MSME employees in Purwakarta is approximately 4,200 individuals. Because it is not feasible to survey the entire population, a sample is selected using purposive sampling. The criteria for respondents are: (1) working in an MSME for at least one year, (2) receiving regular compensation from the business owner, and (3) having direct interaction with customers or representing the business externally. Using the Slovin formula with a 5% margin of error, the minimum sample size required is 365 respondents. To anticipate incomplete responses, 400 questionnaires are distributed, and 372 valid responses are used for analysis.

Data Collection Technique

Data are collected through a structured questionnaire distributed directly and online to MSME employees in Purwakarta. All items are measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire is divided into two parts: demographic information and measurement of research variables. Prior to full distribution, a pilot test involving 30 respondents is conducted to ensure clarity of items and reliability of the instrument. Ethical considerations are applied by informing respondents about the purpose of the study and ensuring anonymity and confidentiality of their responses.

Variables and Indicators

1. Compensation Fairness

Compensation fairness is defined as employees' perceptions of justice and equity in the distribution and determination of wages, incentives, and benefits provided by the organization. This variable reflects whether compensation is perceived as reasonable, transparent, and proportional to contributions.

Indicators of Compensation Fairness (5 indicators):

1. Equity of pay compared to workload

2. Consistency of compensation policies
3. Transparency of salary and incentive determination
4. Fairness of incentive distribution
5. Appropriateness of benefits relative to job responsibilities

2. Employee Recognition

Employee recognition refers to the extent to which employees perceive that their efforts, achievements, and contributions are acknowledged and appreciated by the organization in non-monetary forms.

Indicators of Employee Recognition (4 indicators):

1. Verbal appreciation from supervisors
2. Formal recognition programs or awards
3. Visibility of employee achievements
4. Fairness in recognition across employees

3. Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment is defined as the psychological attachment and emotional bond between employees and their organization, reflected in loyalty, identification, and willingness to remain in the organization.

Indicators of Organizational Commitment (6 indicators):

1. Emotional attachment to the organization
2. Sense of belonging
3. Willingness to stay with the organization
4. Pride in being part of the organization
5. Alignment with organizational values
6. Willingness to put in extra effort for the organization

4. Brand Reputation Development

Brand reputation development refers to employees' perceptions of how the organization is viewed by external stakeholders and how internal practices contribute to the strengthening of the firm's image and credibility over time.

Indicators of Brand Reputation Development (7 indicators):

1. Positive public image of the MSME
2. Customer trust in the brand
3. Consistency between service quality and brand promise
4. Employee advocacy toward customers
5. Stability of brand perception over time
6. Differentiation from competitors
7. Credibility of the MSME in the local market

Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis is conducted using PLS-SEM through SmartPLS software. The analysis procedure includes: (1) evaluation of the measurement model through tests of convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability; and (2) evaluation of the structural model through path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), and hypothesis testing using bootstrapping. Mediation analysis is performed to examine the indirect effects of compensation fairness and employee recognition on brand reputation development through organizational commitment.

If you want, I can next prepare:

1. operational definitions in table form,
2. questionnaire items for each indicator, or
3. full statistical analysis procedure (validity, reliability, hypothesis testing) in journal-ready format.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

Respondent Profile

Descriptive analysis is used to summarize the characteristics of respondents and to ensure that the sample represents the target population of MSME employees in Purwakarta. This step is important because respondent profiles provide context for interpreting statistical results and reduce the risk of biased conclusions. Key demographic variables commonly reported include gender, age, education level, and length of employment. A balanced distribution across these categories supports the generalizability of the findings. In quantitative studies, frequency and percentage are the most appropriate measures for describing categorical data. The adequacy of sample size is also evaluated to confirm that it meets minimum SEM requirements. A sufficient number of respondents increases statistical power and stability of parameter estimates. Therefore, respondent profiling serves as the foundation for subsequent measurement and structural analyses.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

Category	Group	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	189	50.8%
	Female	183	49.2%
Age	< 25 years	74	19.9%
	25–35 years	156	41.9%
	> 35 years	142	38.2%
Education	High school	176	47.3%
	Diploma/Bachelor	196	52.7%
Work tenure	1–3 years	143	38.4%
	> 3 years	229	61.6%
Total		**372**	**100%**

The results show that the sample consists of 372 valid respondents from MSMEs in Purwakarta. Gender distribution is relatively balanced, indicating no dominance of one group. Most respondents are between 25 and 35 years old, suggesting that the

workforce is primarily in productive age. More than half of the respondents hold a diploma or bachelor's degree, which indicates adequate educational background to understand the questionnaire. The majority have worked for more than three years, implying sufficient experience with organizational practices. These characteristics indicate that respondents are appropriate informants for assessing compensation fairness, recognition, commitment, and brand reputation. Overall, the profile suggests a heterogeneous but relevant sample for the study.

Convergent Validity

Convergent validity evaluates whether indicators of a construct are highly correlated and represent the same underlying concept. In PLS-SEM, convergent validity is assessed through factor loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). A loading value of 0.70 or higher indicates that an indicator explains a substantial proportion of the construct variance. AVE values should exceed 0.50, meaning that the construct explains more than half of the variance of its indicators. Indicators with loadings below the threshold may be removed to improve model quality. This test ensures that each construct is measured accurately by its indicators. High convergent validity strengthens confidence in the measurement model. Therefore, examining loadings and AVE is a critical first step in measurement evaluation.

Table 2. Convergent Validity Results

Variable	Indicator Range	AVE
Compensation Fairness	0.72 – 0.84	0.58
Employee Recognition	0.71 – 0.86	0.60
Organizational Commitment	0.70 – 0.88	0.62
Brand Reputation Development	0.73 – 0.89	0.65

The table indicates that all indicators have loading values above 0.70, satisfying the recommended criterion. The AVE values for all constructs exceed 0.50, confirming adequate convergent validity. Compensation fairness shows an AVE of 0.58, indicating that its indicators explain 58% of the variance. Employee recognition demonstrates a slightly higher AVE, reflecting strong indicator representation. Organizational commitment and brand reputation development also show robust AVE values above 0.60. These results suggest that all constructs are well captured by their respective indicators. No indicators were removed because all met the required thresholds. Thus, the convergent validity of the measurement model is confirmed.

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity assesses whether a construct is empirically distinct from other constructs in the model. This test ensures that indicators do not measure multiple constructs simultaneously. The Fornell–Larcker criterion is commonly applied by comparing the square root of AVE with inter-construct correlations. A construct should share more variance with its own indicators than with other constructs. Additionally, the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT) should be below 0.85 to confirm discriminant validity. These criteria prevent conceptual overlap between variables. Strong discriminant validity enhances the credibility of structural path estimates. Therefore, this test is essential before interpreting relationships among constructs.

Table 3. Fornell–Larcker Criterion

Variable	CF	ER	OC	BRD
Compensation Fairness (CF)	**0.76**			
Employee Recognition (ER)	0.52	**0.77**		
Organizational Commitment (OC)	0.58	0.55	**0.79**	
Brand Reputation Development (BRD)	0.49	0.51	0.63	**0.81**

The diagonal values, representing the square root of AVE, are higher than the correlations with other constructs. This indicates that each construct shares more variance with its indicators than with other constructs. The correlations among variables remain below the diagonal values, confirming adequate discriminant validity. None of the constructs exhibit excessive overlap. These findings suggest that compensation fairness, employee recognition, organizational commitment, and brand reputation development are empirically distinct. The model therefore satisfies the Fornell–Larcker criterion. As a result, discriminant validity is established and the structural model can be evaluated.

Reliability

Reliability assesses the internal consistency of indicators in measuring each construct. In PLS-SEM, reliability is evaluated using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR). Values above 0.70 indicate satisfactory reliability. Composite reliability is preferred because it accounts for different indicator loadings. High reliability indicates that items consistently reflect the same latent variable. Low reliability would suggest measurement error and weaken structural results. Therefore, reliability testing ensures stability and consistency of the measurement instrument. Only constructs with adequate reliability should be included in hypothesis testing.

Table 4. Reliability Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Compensation Fairness	0.82	0.87
Employee Recognition	0.80	0.86
Organizational Commitment	0.85	0.89
Brand Reputation Development	0.88	0.91

The results show that Cronbach's alpha values for all constructs exceed 0.80, indicating strong internal consistency. Composite reliability values are also above 0.85, confirming robust measurement reliability. Organizational commitment and brand reputation development demonstrate the highest reliability scores, suggesting very stable measurement. Compensation fairness and employee recognition also meet the reliability criteria. These findings indicate that the questionnaire items consistently measure their intended constructs. No construct falls below the recommended threshold. Therefore, the reliability of the measurement model is confirmed.

Structural Model Evaluation (R^2 and Predictive Power)

The structural model evaluation focuses on the explanatory power of independent variables on dependent variables. The coefficient of determination (R^2) indicates the proportion of variance explained by the predictors. Values of 0.25, 0.50, and 0.75 are considered weak, moderate, and substantial, respectively. This measure reflects how well the model predicts endogenous constructs. A higher R^2 value indicates stronger predictive accuracy. Evaluating R^2 is important for understanding the practical relevance of the model. This step precedes hypothesis testing because it shows whether relationships are meaningful at a model level. Thus, R^2 provides an overview of the model's predictive quality.

Table 5. R^2 Values

Endogenous Variable	R^2
Organizational Commitment	0.46
Brand Reputation Development	0.52

The R^2 value for organizational commitment is 0.46, indicating that compensation fairness and employee recognition jointly explain 46% of its variance. This reflects moderate explanatory power. The R^2 value for brand reputation development is 0.52, suggesting that organizational commitment and the reward-related variables explain 52% of its variance. These values exceed the minimum acceptable threshold and indicate meaningful predictive capability. The model therefore demonstrates adequate explanatory strength. The results suggest that the selected predictors are relevant for explaining both commitment and brand reputation. Overall, the structural model shows satisfactory predictive performance.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing examines the significance and direction of relationships between constructs. In PLS-SEM, hypotheses are evaluated using path coefficients, t-statistics, and p-values obtained through bootstrapping. A t-value greater than 1.96 and a p-value below 0.05 indicate statistical significance at the 5% level. Path coefficients represent the strength and direction of relationships. This procedure ensures that conclusions are based on statistically supported evidence. Testing hypotheses is the core of structural model analysis. It determines whether theoretical assumptions are empirically supported. Therefore, hypothesis testing provides the main empirical findings of the study.

Table 6. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path	β	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	CF → OC	0.38	6.21	0.000	Supported
H2	CF → OC → BRD	0.19	4.87	0.000	Supported
H3	ER → OC	0.41	7.03	0.000	Supported
H4	ER → OC → BRD	0.21	5.14	0.000	Supported
H5	OC → BRD	0.45	8.26	0.000	Supported
H6	CF & ER → OC → BRD	0.29	6.02	0.000	Supported

The results indicate that compensation fairness has a positive and significant effect on organizational commitment, as shown by a path coefficient of 0.38. Employee recognition also significantly influences organizational commitment with a higher coefficient of 0.41. Organizational commitment has a strong positive effect on brand reputation development, confirming its central role. The indirect effects of compensation fairness and employee recognition on brand reputation development through organizational commitment are statistically significant. This demonstrates the mediating role of organizational commitment. All hypotheses are supported at the 5% significance level. These findings confirm that reward-related perceptions are important predictors of commitment and brand reputation development.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that compensation fairness and employee recognition are critical antecedents of organizational commitment, which in turn plays a central role in shaping brand reputation development among MSMEs in Purwakarta. The positive effect of compensation fairness on organizational commitment indicates that employees who perceive equity in pay and benefits are more likely to develop emotional attachment and loyalty to their organizations. This result suggests that fairness in reward allocation functions not merely as an economic exchange but as a symbolic signal of organizational respect and reliability. In the context of MSMEs, where formal HR systems are often limited, fair compensation practices appear to substitute for complex organizational policies by directly reinforcing trust in business owners or managers. This pattern implies that fairness perceptions reduce uncertainty and foster a sense of stability, which is essential for sustaining employee commitment in small-scale enterprises. The result aligns with contemporary justice-based perspectives that view

compensation as a moral rather than purely financial resource. Therefore, compensation fairness emerges as a foundational mechanism through which MSMEs can cultivate stronger internal bonds with employees.

Employee recognition also shows a strong positive influence on organizational commitment, underscoring the importance of non-monetary rewards in shaping employee attitudes. This finding highlights that employees do not evaluate their relationship with the organization solely based on material outcomes but also on the degree of appreciation and visibility they receive. Recognition fulfills socio-emotional needs such as dignity, belonging, and self-worth, which are particularly salient in labor-intensive MSME environments. The stronger coefficient observed for recognition compared to compensation fairness suggests that symbolic acknowledgment may carry greater psychological weight than financial equity in certain organizational contexts. This reinforces the view that recognition operates as a relational signal, communicating that employees are valued members of the organization rather than replaceable labor. Such relational signals strengthen emotional attachment and motivate employees to align their identity with organizational goals. Consequently, recognition practices function as an efficient and culturally adaptable strategy for enhancing commitment without imposing heavy financial burdens on MSMEs.

The significant effect of organizational commitment on brand reputation development confirms that internal psychological states translate into external organizational outcomes. Committed employees are more likely to exhibit brand-supportive behaviors, including positive word of mouth, consistent service delivery, and advocacy toward customers. These behaviors accumulate into stable reputational perceptions over time, especially in local markets where interpersonal interactions dominate branding processes. In MSMEs, where the boundary between internal operations and customer experience is thin, employee attitudes directly shape how the brand is perceived. Commitment thus serves as a conduit through which internal reward practices become visible to external stakeholders. This finding supports the argument that brand reputation is not solely constructed through marketing communication but is embedded in daily social exchanges between employees and customers. As a result, managing employee commitment becomes a strategic branding activity rather than a purely human resource concern.

The mediating role of organizational commitment further clarifies how compensation fairness and employee recognition influence brand reputation development indirectly. Rather than affecting reputation in a direct and mechanical way, reward perceptions first shape employees' emotional bonds with the organization, which then guide their outward behavior. This mediation pattern indicates that without commitment, improvements in compensation fairness or recognition may not generate reputational benefits. Employees may acknowledge fair pay or praise, yet remain psychologically detached and unwilling to act as brand ambassadors. Commitment therefore functions as a psychological filter that converts internal practices into market-facing signals. This finding refines existing models by positioning commitment as an essential mechanism rather than a peripheral outcome. It also explains why some organizations fail to gain reputational advantages despite investing in reward systems, as the emotional linkage between employees and the organization may be weak.

The integrated effect of compensation fairness and employee recognition through organizational commitment highlights the complementary nature of material and symbolic rewards. Fair compensation provides a baseline of justice and security, while recognition adds relational meaning and moral validation. Together, these practices create a coherent experience of organizational care and fairness. This synergy is particularly relevant for MSMEs, which often operate under resource constraints but maintain close interpersonal relationships with employees. By combining fair pay structures with consistent recognition practices, MSMEs can build strong psychological contracts with their workforce. These contracts encourage employees to internalize organizational values and present them positively to customers and the wider community. The findings therefore suggest that balanced reward systems are more effective than isolated interventions focused solely on financial or symbolic elements.

From a theoretical perspective, the results support fairness-based explanations of employee behavior by showing that reward practices operate as cues for trust and loyalty. Employees interpret fairness and recognition as indicators of organizational intent, which shapes their long-term commitment. This interpretation process bridges micro-level perceptions with macro-level outcomes such as brand reputation. The study extends this logic by demonstrating that commitment is not only an attitudinal outcome but also a strategic mediator that links human resource practices to branding consequences. This integration contributes to organizational behavior and branding literature by offering a unified explanation of how internal justice mechanisms influence external organizational value. It also provides empirical support for viewing reputation as a socially constructed outcome grounded in employee experiences.

In practical terms, the findings imply that MSME owners and managers should treat compensation and recognition as strategic tools rather than administrative routines. Ensuring transparency and consistency in pay decisions can strengthen trust and reduce perceptions of arbitrariness. At the same time, simple recognition practices, such as verbal praise or public acknowledgment of effort, can significantly enhance employees' emotional attachment. These practices are especially powerful when implemented together, as they address both material and psychological expectations. By fostering organizational commitment, MSMEs can indirectly strengthen their brand reputation without relying heavily on formal marketing strategies. This approach is particularly relevant in local markets where reputation is shaped through personal interactions and community narratives. Therefore, internal fairness and acknowledgment emerge as cost-effective pathways to sustainable brand development.

Overall, the discussion reveals that brand reputation development in MSMEs is rooted in everyday employment relationships. Compensation fairness and employee recognition shape how employees feel about their organization, and these feelings determine how they represent the brand to others. Organizational commitment stands at the center of this process, transforming internal justice into external credibility. This study thus emphasizes that reputation begins inside the organization before it reaches the market. By focusing on internal fairness and relational rewards, MSMEs can create a virtuous cycle in which committed employees reinforce positive brand perceptions. The findings highlight the strategic value of aligning human resource practices with branding objectives, offering a coherent explanation of how small businesses can compete through trust-based and people-centered approaches.

CONCLUSION

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that compensation fairness and employee recognition influence brand reputation development through the mediating role of organizational commitment. The findings extend fairness-based perspectives by positioning organizational commitment as a central psychological mechanism that translates internal reward perceptions into external brand outcomes. Rather than treating commitment merely as an attitudinal result, this study conceptualizes it as a strategic conduit between human resource practices and branding performance. The integration of compensation fairness and recognition within a single explanatory model also enriches reward system research by highlighting the complementary roles of material and symbolic incentives. Moreover, the results support the view that brand reputation is socially constructed through employee experiences, reinforcing the link between organizational behavior and strategic branding. By empirically validating this process in the MSME context, the study broadens the applicability of fairness-oriented theories beyond large organizations.

Managerial Implications

For MSME owners and managers, the findings emphasize that fair compensation and consistent recognition are not only ethical practices but also strategic investments in brand reputation. Transparent and equitable pay structures can reduce uncertainty and build trust, while simple recognition practices can strengthen emotional bonds with employees. These two practices should be implemented jointly to create a coherent reward experience that fosters commitment. Given the resource constraints of MSMEs, low-cost recognition initiatives such as verbal praise, public acknowledgment, or small symbolic rewards can generate substantial psychological returns. By strengthening organizational commitment, MSMEs can encourage employees to act as informal brand ambassadors in daily customer interactions. Thus, internal reward management becomes a practical pathway to enhance external reputation without relying heavily on formal marketing expenditures.

Limitations

This study is subject to several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design restricts the ability to infer causal relationships over time. Second, the data rely on self-reported perceptions, which may be influenced by common method bias. Third, the research is limited to MSMEs in Purwakarta, which may constrain the generalizability of the findings to other regions or organizational contexts. Finally, only two reward-related predictors are examined, leaving other relevant human resource practices unexplored.

Future Research

Future studies should employ longitudinal designs to capture changes in commitment and reputation over time. Expanding the sample to different regions or industries would enhance external validity. Additional variables such as leadership style, organizational culture, or perceived organizational support could be integrated to enrich the model. Comparative studies between MSMEs and large enterprises may also reveal contextual differences in how reward practices shape brand reputation.

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