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# An Employee Perspective on Corporate Social Responsibility in Global Markets:

A Case Study of Bangladesh Garments Industry

by

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# Abstract

**Purpose and aim** – The purpose of this research is to analyze new empirical material regarding how employees in the garment industry in developing countries understand Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), what the main concerns regarding CSR are from the perspective of these employees, and how this understanding and concern may differ or resemble those we understand employees in industrialized countries are having.

This research aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how CSR is understood and being of concern to employees in global garment markets. From a theoretical point of view, this research is expected to contribute to a more complex view of CSR on global markets regarding the employee perspective, hence contributing to the field of marketing and CSR at a global level. Furthermore, the results from the study presented here are expected to contribute to practitioner understanding of how to better understand CSR from an employee perspective on global markets, including both developing and industrialized countries.

**Methods and procedures** – A case study design of the Bangladesh garment industry is used. This case industrialized study provides qualitative material for a comparative analysis of possible differences and similarities between the understanding of CSR among employees in developed and developing countries. The analysis also aims at understanding the main concerns of employees regarding CSR as expressed among employees in developing countries compared to those in developed countries.

**Results** – Results from the study indicates that the understanding of and concern about CSR has many differences between developed and developing countries, yet the study also suggests that there are many important similarities in the view on CSR as well. In addition, this study also demonstrates that there are reasons to consider not only differences between developing and developed countries, but also similarities and distinctions between employees within specific geographical areas such as developing countries.

**Implications** – This study is one of the first in bringing forward important complexities in CSR on global markets from an employee perspective. As such, it contributes to the field of comparative CSR in its comparison of employee CSR in developing countries to those in developed countries. The result from this study is hence contributing to the extension of the current CSR literature treating global markets, but also to practitioners in their everyday activities as actors on global markets. This thesis opens for future research in comparative CSR, employee CSR and CSR on global markets.

**Keywords:** Corporate Social Responsibility, CSR, comparative CSR, global markets, developing countries, developed countries, industrialized countries, employees, workers, managers.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Corporate Social Responsibility is a field that has grown extensively both theoretically and empirically. With the emergence of a theoretical field of Corporate Social Responsibility as important among management scholars (Carroll, 1999; Locket et al, 2006), a curriculum of corporate social responsibility has also become established in business schools (Christensen et al, 2007). This means that Corporate Social Responsibility as a theoretical and educational field has grown in importance. Meanwhile, the field of Corporate Social Responsibility has also become central among management practitioners and other actors on many markets. For instance, consumers have been found to pay attention to Corporate Social Responsibility in their consumption (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2004; Kaul and Luo, 2018). Other market actors having an interest in Corporate Social Responsibility are investors (Ioannou and Serafeim, 2015), suppliers (Cerne, 2019), and employees (Fitzgerald, 1999; Preuss et al, 2009; Zheng et al, 2015).

The employee perspective has in the literature on Corporate Social Responsibility often been treated as a stakeholder perspective where employees are understood as important for the outcomes of the business activities on markets (Fitzgerald, 1999; Freeman, 1984; Zheng et al, 2015). However, the wellbeing of employees can also be of concern to other market actors, for instance consumers who want to support good working conditions at supplier sites through their consumption (Dholakia and Firat, 2003). This has been particularly important for consumers in the garment industry (Cerne, 2019). After China, Bangladesh is the second largest garment exporter country in the world, and it exports approximately \$20 billion in a year (Preuss, 2016). Besides this, the industry is growing higher (M. Taplin, 2014). Asian countries such as Bangladesh is one the favorable choice as a supplier because of many reasons. In the last few decades, population growth has emerged rapidly, and vice versa and demand increased in the western world (Khurana & Ricchetti, 2016). On the other hand, the fast fashion business model forced the company for high production of products with short delivery times and low prices. Taplin, 2014). These dimensions create significant impacts on the fashion market. To capture the market, maximize the profit, and take a competitive advantage; all fashion industries have adopted a low-price and short delivery time process (Lueg et al., 2015).

Fashion industries have chosen developing countries such as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Cambodia as they have a cheap labor rate. In such countries, some ethical issues such as working hours, working environment, etc. are very weaker than in the developed country. For many years, the violation of ethical problems in the fashion industry was highlighted. However, it was underscored extensively after the Rana Plaza collapsed in Bangladesh on April 14, 2013, and 1,127 people died in that incident (M. Taplin, 2014). In the previous decade, 800 people have died, and among them, 100 people have died in the prior years of the arena plaza incident. Most of the reasons for these incidents were fire issues (M. Taplin, 2014).

However, after the Rana Plaza incident, media play a vital role and telecast all over the world about the dark side of this industry, and therefore, many action-reactions come from different actors' level, but most reaction comes from the sustainable and conscious consumer end (M. Taplin, 2014). An ethical consumption consciousness rises among the consumer, and they raise a voice against the fashion industry that, industries should look after ethical issues.

Some fashion retailers selling internationally and sourcing globally, such as H & M, Lindex, and KappAhl with headquarters in Sweden, were the critical focus of doing unethical business practice and thus affected their reputation and for their competitiveness in the market. To uphold and change the image, they have initiated to apply ethical issues under Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policy. Though CSR is not a new idea, it was taken as a core business activity in 2010 by the launch of ISO 26,000. Because of the globalization movement around the world supply chain management (SCM) become one of the critical concerns in the business sector. Company has the essential responsibility to select their suppliers, logistic decision, and operations system to avoid social and environmental impacts in the world. It was highlighted that; a company is not sustainable if it does not follow the sustainable SCM system. The first issue was to ensure the wage compliance of the worker in the whole supply SCM process. As all industries are looking for a low wage rate around the world, therefore, the three main areas of wages, working hours, and working conditions are defined under social issues (Perry & Towers, 2013). To ensure sustainable supplier practices, four code of conduct framework was designed: international standards, extended frameworks, supplier codes of conduct, and supplier social audits (Perry & Towers, 2013). These policies were adopted to ensure that, suppliers are providing working environments for the workers and pay minimum wages according to the country's labor law.

## 1.2 Problematization

Consequently, employee perspectives on Corporate Social Responsibility are important yet they also vary depending on different categories of employees (Crane and Matten, 2016). For instance, in industrialized countries employee issues regarding Corporate Social Responsibility may concern equal opportunities for men and women regarding promotion to senior positions (Kolhatkar, 2014) or employee privacy regarding the ability to control information about themselves (Boatright, 2012). Meanwhile, in so called developing countries, issues regarding employees may take a different character, for instance work-life balance (Kalliath and Brough, 2008) or excessive working (Mirvis, 2012). This means that multinational corporations acting on global markets may face multiple yet varying types of issues regarding employee oriented Corporate Social Responsibility.

After taking various initiatives, it was found that there are still problems affecting the fashion industries production area. Fashion companies are trying to maximize their profit and give a very intense timeline to deliver products (Lueg et. al., 2015). On the other hand, developing countries have a cheap labor workforce but less capital. Therefore, these developing countries are adopting this model for economic growth of the country. Many different fashion industries have mentioned their website about ensuring a minimum wage for the worker, but this may change customer focus marketing, but it is ensuring ethical issues of workers/employees. Though previous research shows that, the traditional monitoring

system has failed to ensure good CSR policy to establish ethical in operations (Perry & Towers, 2013). There are many reasons for this. Some researcher argues that CSR is big arena, and it is tough to concise, and many scholars argue that recent CSR on fashion industries are more customer oriented and has very less research on employee perception (Lee et al.,2013). Therefore, an obvious problem arises, the CSR policy in the fashion industries is only company focusing which motives are to maximize their own business.

Clearly, if employees perceive CSR positively in an organization where they work, this can lead to benefits for the employer organizations, for instance the motivation among employees (Wang et al, 2020). Meanwhile, employee attitudes toward CSR can differ depending on their attitudes towards the organization compared to their attitudes towards society (Rodrigo & Arenas, 2008). In the garment industry and the related suppliers in developing countries, it has also been found that traditional inspection methods among global companies have failed to ensure good CSR, but that also in the garment industry employees need to be motivated by good CSR (Perry & Towers, 2013). However, in order to engage employees, it is important to understand the employee voice in order to contribute to workplace democracy and engaging employees in socio-ethical issues (Mirvis, 2012).

Another central issue concerning employees and working conditions on global markets is whether to standardize or adapt Corporate Social Responsibility globally. Globalization was for long understood as creating opportunities for global market actors through the standardization of the marketing mix (product, price, promotion, and place), where economies of scale were the strategic objective (Levitt, 1983). This standardization perspective of global markets has been highly used and supported.

It is often assumed that Corporate Social Responsibility should either be standardized to include a global approach to employee rights and working conditions, or that it should be adapted to local conditions (Crane & Matten, 2016). For global production in so called developing countries, the goal is often to reach standards towards those claimed to exist in industrialized countries. However, studies of CSR suggest that CSR is quite context-based (Tilt, 2013; Wanderlei et al, 2008). Developing countries differ in context compared to industrialized countries. Therefore, it is relevant to understand employee perspectives in developing countries for multinational corporations to initiate and implement relevant CSR in global markets. Considering the importance of the garment industry for developing countries (Gereffi, 1999).

Despite this importance of employee perspectives in CSR, as argued here, there is a lack of understanding in the CSR literature regarding how employees in the garment industry in developing countries understand Corporate Social Responsibility, what the main concerns regarding Corporate Social Responsibility are from the perspective of these employees, and how this understanding and concern may differ or resemble those we understand employees in industrialized countries are having. This has led to some important research questions as summarized in the next part.



## 1.3 Research Questions

Based on the discussion and problematization of the CSR literature as outlined above, this has led to four research questions guiding the rest of this work. As discussed in the background and the problematization, these research questions are generated both from a practical perspective in that we know that multinational corporations struggle with the implementation of CSR, and also from a theoretical perspective where we lack views on CSR from employees in developing countries where the garment industry has a central role for economic development. In order to include also social aspects in this development, there are particularly four research questions to focus on:

1. *How do employees in the garment industry in developing countries understand Corporate Social Responsibility?*
2. *What are the main concerns among employees in the garment industry in developing countries regarding Corporate Social Responsibility?*
3. *How do concerns among employees in the garment industry in developing countries regarding Corporate Social Responsibility differ from concerns among employees in industrialized countries (on a more general level)?*
4. *How are concerns among employees in the garment industry in developing countries regarding Corporate Social Responsibility similar to concerns among employees in industrialized countries (on a more general level)?*

## 1.4 Research purpose

The purpose of this research is firstly to create knowledge about how employees in the garment industry in developing countries understand Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Secondly, the aim is to explore what the main concerns regarding CSR are from the perspectives of these employees. Thirdly, the ambition is to capture how this understanding may differ from or be similar to those we understand as part of employee understandings in industrialized countries.

## 1.5 Research Contribution

This research aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how Corporate Social Responsibility is understood and being of concern to employees in global garment markets. From a theoretical point of view, this research is expected to contribute to a more complex view of Corporate Social Responsibility on global markets regarding the employee perspective, hence contributing to the field of marketing and Corporate Social Responsibility at a global level. Furthermore, the results from the study presented here is expected to contribute to practitioner understandings of how to better understand Corporate Social Responsibility from an employee perspective on global markets, including both developing and industrialized countries.

## 1.6 Research Outline

This thesis begins with a literature review by exploring previous theory in the field of CSR and garment industries from an employee perspective. Based on this literature review, a theoretical framework opening for specific research questions is suggested. To answer these research questions, an empirical study has been performed with a case study design. The method of, as well as the results from, the case study are presented and analyzed with the help of the suggested theoretical framework. Finally, the findings from the empirical study are critically discussed, suggesting theoretical and practical implications as well as outlining suggestions for future studies.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Corporate Social Responsibility and its Definitions

For many years CSR has been defined and developed from several aspects and still academicians, and corporates are finding it difficult to generalize because of its wide ranges of subjects. The concept and practice were started in the Western world, and the modern concept emerged in the time of the early 20th century. As business has expanded around the world, the CSR concept has emerged according to it (Rahman, 2011). The main aim of CSR is to encourage companies to behave like a socially responsible actor. A more elaborate purpose is to give guidelines for business actors to behave socially responsible in their decision, in business strategies, or in the management of their operations. Bowen (1953: 6) gave a prior definition that 'CSR refers to the obligations of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society'. After a few years Heald (1957) stated that 'CSR is recognition on the part of the management of an obligation to the society it serves not only for maximum economic performance but for humane and constructive social policies as well.' It is understood from the above definition that, at an early age, scholars defined CSR as related to social issues.

After that, ethical issues have emerged in the CSR definition. In the time of the 1960s, business organizations started to produce and sell unethical products to make profits, which had a negative impact on the environment, society, and humankind (Rahman, 2011). In that time, Frederick (1960) said about CSR that, '[Social responsibilities] mean that businessmen should oversee the operation of an economic system that fulfills the expectations of the public. And this means in turn that the economy's means of production should be employed in such a way that production and distribution should enhance total socio-economic welfare'. In the last few decades, it has emerged and is connected with the stakeholder theory, firm citizenship, and corporate philanthropy (Maignan et al.1999; Carroll, 1979; 1998). Thus, now, CSR is not only associated with the socially responsible model but also an integral part of business development.

According to Global Corporate Social Responsibility Policies Project, (2003) "[g]lobal corporate social responsibility can be defined as business practices based on ethical values and respect for workers, communities, and the environment". Furthermore, McWilliams and Siegel (2001) said that "actions that appear to further some social good, beyond the interests of the firm and social that which is required by law". Though there is no concrete boundary of CSR but to ensure a measurement for good CSR definition, the researcher has defined CSR under five dimensions: the stakeholder dimension, social dimension, economic dimension, voluntariness dimension and environmental dimension (Dahlsrud, 2008). In the time being it was evolved from a different dimension and included many aspects - economic development, ethical practices, environmental protection, stakeholder involvement, transparency, accountability, responsible behavior, moral obligation, corporate responsiveness, and corporate social responsibility (Rahman, 2011).

To address CSR, one of the most established and accepted models is Carroll's 'four-part model of corporate social responsibility' (Crane and Matten, 2016). Carroll argued CSR as a multi-layered concept, and which can be differentiated into four characteristics- economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities (Crane and Matten, 2016):

- a. Economic responsibilities. Companies first responsibility is to become economically viable. Considering the stakeholder of the company; the company has shareholders who look for a good return for their investment. Employee, who performs a job in the organization, wants better job and facilities. Customers want better quality products and services from the company to the full fill their demand. So, the first responsibility of a business organization to become sound in economy
- b. Legal responsibility. The legal responsibility is organizations must follow all laws and regulations. Every country has different laws and regulations. As a responsible organization company must comply that. Carroll (1991) mentioned that maintain law is essential who wants to be a socially responsible company.
- c. Ethical responsibility. This responsibility is obliged to the corporation regarding performing what is right and fair even when it is not compiled by the law. Ethical responsibility is generally expected by society over economic and legal expectations.
- d. Philanthropic responsibility. This responsibility is to perform good things for humans. By following this, the corporation has the responsibility to improve the quality life of an employee, local communities, and overall society. In this sector, the organization has many issues that they can perform, such as charity, local cluster development, infrastructure development such as school, hospital, etc.

The benefit of the four-part model is that it addresses social problems and responsibilities from different levels. However, the model has some limitations, and the main limitation is that it does not mention what to do when an organization faces more than two responsibilities at a time (Crane and Matten, 2016).

The arena and importance of CSR however has other dimensions too, for instance how the Social Economic Council describes it as the welfare of society as not only depending on economic value, but including other dimensions in the form of the Triple-P bottom line concept (Graafland & van de Ven, 2006):

**Profit: The economic dimension.** This dimension highlights creation value through the production of goods and services and creates employment opportunity and sources of income.

**People: The social dimension.** This dimension highlights the impact of a corporation's operation on a human — both outside and inside of the organization such as labor law, health, and safety.

**Planet: The ecological dimension.** This dimension says about the effects of the company operates on the environment.

With the employee perspective as the focus in this master thesis, this means that workers as part of socially responsible business and economy. Also, as stated above, the concept of CSR is understood as going beyond economic and legal aspects in business, leading to the considerations of social dimensions of people, especially ethical ones.

## 2.2 Ethical Concepts in CSR

Though CSR is a charitable concept but most of the business organizations take CSR as a platform to promote their business. However certain business organization thinks CSR is not only an economic motive or profit motive, but it has moral responsibilities to fulfill for the society. Highlighting this importance, Etzioni (1988) says that the deontological motive is more important than the economic motive. If we see this from the consumer perspective, in previous days, the consumers will select their products based on quality, value for money and financial performance but now, with the public added corporate responsibility, e.g. treatment of employees, community involvement, with ethical and environmental, this has changed (Dawkins & Lewis, 2003). Highlighting the ethical issue, Jackson (1997) says that domestic and ethical cultures increase trust but also requires efforts and commitment on behalf of customers, suppliers, and other stakeholders.

As ethical issues have become one of the concerns at the global level, the challenging part is to implement it by MNCs in their business (Shamir, 2008). In the global situation, cultural value differs from one context to another context (Hofstede,1980; 1994) and this is the something that can be linked to moral values (Crane and Matten, 2016). Culture is a complex issue but the presence of cosmopolitan culture in a firm brings strategic advantages (Hosmer, 1994). Culture is constituted by law, knowledge, morals, customs, and “other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Kerr et al., 1960; Hindman & Smith, 1999). Besides this, it includes family system, class and race, religion and ethical valuations, legal structure, and the concept of the nation-state (Hindman & Smith, 1999). Therefore, to implement ethical practices globally company needs to give focus on many issues.

Multinational corporations (MNCs) face difficulties regarding identifying norms as it subsists at local, national, regional, international, and global levels (Jackson,1997). Roles of norms shape the attitude, behavior, and intentions of people. It also gives ideas about what is wrong and what is the right thing to do or what people should do (Rettie et al., 2014). According to Jackson (1997), to solve norms related issues, an organization can create a code of conduct policy by analyzing all countries culture where they are operating their business. Furthermore, develop the policy continuously and teach the people of the companies about different ethical issues.

Many ethical and legal issues are addressed as a standard from the various international institutions (the European Union, the World Trade Organization, the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, NAFTA, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development). Considering different issues such as human rights, labour issues, international recognized civil and international law, these organization have defined different issues such

as conflicts of interest, deception, discrimination, embezzlement, fraud, forgery, genocide, slavery, theft is prohibited, respect for confidentiality, acting in good faith, obedience to law, honoring the rights of others (Jackson,1997).

Considering CSR definitions and its arena, we can understand the noble aim of CSR as to create a better society from the contribution of business organizations. However, a business organization is not entirely decision-maker of business issues. Stakeholders play a very important role in this. As this paper aim is to highlight employee perception of CSR therefore, below this paper will highlight the overall impotence of stakeholders and the role of employees.

## 2.3 Employees as Stakeholders

The stakeholder approach was widespread in the time of the 1980s, though it was first introduced in the business on the 1960s. The concept defined corporation role and responsibility towards different groups or stakeholders. It was also mentioned that not only the corporation has an interest in these groups or stakeholders but also stakeholders have various interest in corporations (Crane and Matten, 2016). Highlighting the importance of the stakeholders, Stanford Memo said that, 'those groups without whose support the organization would cease to exist' (Freeman,1984). On the other hand, corporations have an influential impact on stakeholders. According to Freeman (1984), stakeholders 'can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives'. So, who are the stakeholders? Considering the corporate context, Metcalfe (1998) says that 'a stakeholder is entitled to consideration in some ways similar to a shareholder, and stakeholders may thus include employees, customers, shareholders, suppliers, the state, and the local communities'. Alike above there are different definitions and to specify the definition, Evan and Freeman (1993) suggested two principles. They are *principles of corporates rights* and *principles of corporates effect*. *Principle of corporate rights* means, corporation has a binding not to violate the rights of other and *principles of corporates effect* means corporations have responsibility for their action to others (Crane and Matten, 2016). As every corporation has a different business type and in time of business journey many issues are added, and many issues become unimportant. Therefore, it affirms that the different organization has different stakeholder and in a different situation, it may change.

Good CSR practice in business is depending on stakeholder's involvement, their influence and playing a role at a different level. CSR practices bring business returns such as customer loyalty, enhance company image and these are depending on how stakeholders perceive the company as a social commitment. Another stakeholder perception of CSR following the company is the organizational commitment, reputation, and capacity to attract employees (Costa & Menichini, 2013). Stakeholder also penalizes companies who say about socially responsible but do not follow this. In this situation, it is important to involve stakeholders in CSR planning (Costa & Menichini, 2013). However, as stakeholders have a broad category arena therefore, one question arises, do all stakeholders have the same importance level?

The goal of business organizations is to maximize their profit which can maximize the wealth of shareholders. As shareholders are the owners therefore, most of the organizations give priority on shareholder as a major stakeholder. Consequently, other shareholders did not get

priority from a historical point of view. However, according to the stakeholder approach, companies are not accountable only to their shareholders, but should give priority to other stakeholders that can affect or are affected by their operations (Freeman 1984). Greenwood (2008) argues that employees are one of the more important stakeholders for the organization. To mention a more specific way, Lynch-Fannon (2004) argues "employees are the most significant non-shareholding corporate stakeholding group". Giving further importance Crane and Matten (2016) has mentioned that, perhaps employees are the most important stakeholders. It is mentioned because employees are the key factors who run and develop corporation's operation system, take initiatives and implement through a different mechanism, help organization to move towards success and furthermore represent the corporation towards other stakeholders.

Considering the relationship between the corporation and employees, Crane and Matten (2016) described two aspects. *Legal* and economic aspects. From a legal perspective, the employee and employer's relation is embedded by the contract. This contract defends many issues such as minimum wages, working conditions and so on. But with globalization, here another issue arises where most of the countries have their own laws and regulations regarding employer-employee relations where organizations need to follow the law. In an economic aspect, employees invest time and effort to develop organization assets. In this aspect, some moral and ethical issue arises. For the job employee, moving from one place to another by leaving their own place, friends and families, finding a new school for children, etc., can be very difficult to manage. Additionally, as most of the time of the day employees pass at the office therefore for well-being social life, the employee needs friends at office work. All this shows employee dependency on employers and as a responsible employer, the organization should try to comply with this. Moreover, organizations are also depending on their employees. As employees help to build the assets of the organization therefore, they can also create a negative impact on it. An employee has all the information, planning of organization and employee can share this to organization competitors. So, employers are also depending on the employee (Crane and Matten 2016). However, from a comparative view, employees are the weaker position in this relationship, and therefore, scholars think that CSR has not only a legal responsibility to ensure employees/ workers right but also ethical ones (Crane and Matten 2016). Below, I will first consider CSR and the law from a global perspective. After that, I will continue with the ethical perspective.

## 2.4 CSR and the Law from a Global Perspective

In the abovementioned CSR model by Carroll (1979), every corporation is expected to perform business activities by following rules and regulation, understood as the legal responsibility, which is imposed for the betterment of society. However, the perception of law in relation to CSR, from a global perspective, is different from the conventional law which generally imposed by the state or internationally. CSR is generally understood by 'doing more than what is required by law' (Anku-Tsedee et al., 2019). So, CSR also talks and do beyond the law. It is a mix of both legally and non-legally issues and norms which can support for the betterment of the society. Already it is becoming common to European Union (EU) and other countries to highlight legal requirements in corporations report. In Denmark, the largest companies are now required by law to report on their CSR activities and efforts in their annual reports (CSRgov.dk, 2010).

CSR and law are connected in various ways. Governments used statutory law as a tool to impose any action or guideline to the corporation. Highlighting the international law government try to engage corporation to take their action (Buhmann, 2006). Also, in time of accusing a corporation regarding violation of human rights, labor rights, and environmental protection, current or prospective employees' rights, consumers and other stakeholders' rights base one the assessments of law, including principles of law. CSR is not an only related issue with the corporations, but it also has a significant role to create good governance and welfare state. CSR help government to impose laws at the corporation and this initiative encourages foreign investor especially who prefer to invest in ethical and social to comply with companies. In similar it contributes to ensure human rights, increase workers benefit in the third world countries where labor is surplus than to available jobs. Therefore, the corporation tries to give low salaries and ignore other human rights issues. Furthermore, CSR and law both help each other to formulate new policies and actions to mitigate different problems because of the raising globalization and its effect on a country (Buhmann, 2006).

CSR and its law have become a concern in internationally in the 1990s as MNCs powerful impact on developing countries regarding violating human rights, environment and employment-related issues (Cutler, 2006; Utting, 2000; DeWinter, 2001; Detomasi, 2007). Later it was highlighted as MNCs production process and environment problem, labor market and economic problem in the society (Detomasi, 2007). After that, CSR seems to perform international law more in human rights, labor rights, and the environmental ground. To encourage the CSR, the EU has published documents by following the ILO standards and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) guidelines. But according to the current international law, international law does not apply to the corporation as a legal compulsion furthermore, according to the theory of law, any implementation of the law is the responsibility of the states. Therefore, in global markets, legislation can be difficult to implement.

However, there are some guidelines and concepts. According to United Nations (UN) code of conduct on Transnational Corporations (TNCs) they highlighted some obligations such as respect for the sovereignty of the host state and its political system, respect for human rights, avoid corrupt practices, not damaging the economic well-being of the countries in which a firm operates, follow of tax and anti-monopoly laws, and ensuring full disclosure concerning the activities of the firm (Muchlinski, 2011). Similarly, OECD has a guideline for the social obligations of Multinational Enterprises (MNEs) (Muchlinski, 2011). OECD also mentioned corporate governance as a policy follow. According to Haufler (2001) CSR as 'a potential new source of global governance, that is, mechanisms to reach collective decisions about transnational problems with or without government participation'. This form of governance requires bargaining, conflict as well as collaboration among business groups, civil society, governmental agencies, and international organizations to solve issues (Teegen et al., 2004). Another concept was suggested by the UN at the Human Rights Council regarding the stakeholder approach (Muchlinski, 2011).

This means that CSR from a legal perspective is different on global markets compared to domestic markets. Consequently, it is difficult to rely on the law under these circumstances. As suggested by the literature taken up here, there are other ways than legal to govern CSR in global markets. This also means that ethics may be more important for CSR in global markets. In the next section I will take this up in relation to an employee-oriented perception of CSR.



## 2.5 Employee Oriented Perception and Ethics

Employee oriented CSR has a very positive impact on employees' attitudes and behavior towards the organization, since generally, those companies follow the economic, ethical and law-oriented business, can lead to employees having a more positive perception for the organization (Lee et al., 2013). This internal motivation helps to develop the internal brand of the organization (Ali et al., 2010). Furthermore, an employee orientation has a positive effect on employee commitment and thus increases company performance (Ali et al., 2010). Therefore, many CSR oriented organizations see employee perception as one of the key elements of good CSR practice. This has also been found to motivate employees to participate in and develop CSR activities of the organization (Morsing et al., 2008). According to Lee et al. (2013) a company should focus on employee-based CSR policy and include employee's perception, something that could lead to that their experience will lead to better performance.

As mentioned before, ethical aspects are an important part of CSR. Added to this, as taken up here, employees are playing a vital role for the organization and therefore the employees perceive their organization based on their own moral identity. A strong moral identity helps to identify CSR by developing stronger organizational identification (Wang et al., 2017). However, if management of the organization treats employees as a means towards the ends of the organization, this raises ethical issues. Crane and Matten (2016) stated that human beings deserve respect and certain basic rights through a link with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) as stated for a common baseline of human from a global perspective by considering diverse cultures and religions. Therefore, many global companies have begun to align their employment policy with human rights (Crane and Matten, 2016). Crane and Matten (2016) have described in their book 'Business Ethics' major ethical problems between employer and employee relation. Important issues are given below.

### 1. Discrimination

#### a. Workplace discrimination:

This discrimination occurs when employees get benefits or being ignored because of their different characteristics. Here performance to a job or qualification is ignored. The most common bases are occurred because of race, gender, religion, disability, and nationality (Kaupins & Park, 2010; Crane and Matten, 2016). Also, there are other factors such as marital status, physical appearance and gender facts (Kaupins & Park, 2010; Crane and Matten, 2016).

#### b. Sexual and racial harassment:

This discrimination occurs by gossip, comments and creating jokes based on a person's gender, race, sexual orientation. Though negative talk is defined as mild discrimination, it also occurred in the time of salary fixing, promotion, job opportunities.

#### c. Equal opportunities and affirmative action:

Taking equal opportunity policy is to look at many issues such as ensure fair recruitment process, fair job criteria, providing training programs equally for personal development, a promotion at the senior post. To ensure that an organization can look at the legislation process of the country. Many countries have well-

established legal framework regarding anti-discrimination. Also, the organization makes its own policies to avoid discrimination.

## 2. Employee privacy:

Ensure employee privacy is another important fundamental issue (Kaupins & Park, 2010). It needs to determine which information on employees can be controlled or shared. Michele Simms (1994) states about four types of privacy that might need to protect.

### a. Physical privacy:

It is to ensure that everyone has own space to live and in the workplace. In an example, organizations place surveillance cameras in employee's private restroom.

### b. Social privacy:

Employee has the freedom to live their private life as per their own choice and it will not hamper their career progress.

### c. Informational privacy:

It needs to determine which data of employee can be seen in the time of the recruitment process and share to an organization. Also, employers monitor social media of employees outside the workplace which needs to fix that, when and how much employers can monitor.

### d. Psychological privacy:

Controlling employees' emotion or cognitive inputs and outputs and also not give importance to private thoughts and judgment.

### e. Health and drug testing:

Health issue is a critical factor of ethics. To find a healthy employee or for the necessity of the operation system, employers take health test of employees. This testing arena needs to determine wisely according to the job nature.

### f. Due process and layoffs:

Because of many reasons the company needs to terminate their employees such as for downsizing, business loss, disciplinary issues or any other matters. Similarly, an employee also leave the organization for many reasons such as to find a better opportunity. For both situations, the company should follow the ideal exit policy of the employee. The company must pay numeration and other facilities in time as per government legislation and company policy.

## 3. Employee participation and association:

As a human being, employees are not only treated as a resource of the organization but also employees have rights and own perception towards the organization. This right gives employees to pursue their own interests or desire with some degree of participation in the workplace. To pursue interest employee has a right to form association such as employee union. From this union, an employee can raise their demand such as increase job environment and other facilities.

#### 4. Working condition:

The safe and healthy environment at the working place is one of the important ethical issues for the employee. At present countries have implemented healthy, safety and environmental (HSE) regulations to ensure a better place for the employees. This regulation needs to comply strictly for the industrialized organization where chances of environmental hazards are more than the normal office. Besides this other important to make a better working place such as canteen facility, day care facility, primary treatment center, rest place, etc.

#### 5. Work- Life balance:

Work-life balance means a healthy lifestyle between work and non-work activities and according to (Kalliath and Brough, 2008) this is very difficult to maintain. In an example for excessive work fathers- a mother cannot give enough time to their family, children. There are two most pressing issues are

##### a. Excessive working hours and presenteeism

Excessive working hours create a negative impact on employee's life. Besides physical problems, it also creates a mental problem. Another term is presenteeism. An employee needs to work during their off-day time, after office time or even in time of sick (Cooper, 19196). This scenario mostly difficult for the women's who has responsibility for childcare at home (Simpson, 1998)

##### b. Flexible working patterns

Flexible working hours enhance job preference and opportunities for the employee especially for the women who have to look after children and families. On the other hand, it also creates a problem because of the unusual time of the job. Karreen Legge (1998) states that the flexibility of work is another way for management to perform work by the employees whenever they want. This problem generally seems at service industries such as cleaning companies, call center companies, etc. These workers seem to work in an unusual social hour. This ethical issue is very difficult to mitigate. Sometimes extra allowance or facilities are provided to balance the issue.

#### 6. Fair wages:

The most critical and important factor is to ensure fair wages in the organization. fair wages depend on employee's quality, performance, job importance, and other factors. In most of the countries, the minimum wage is fixed by the government especially for the low-income jobs. However, it is difficult to ensure fair wages among the top to bottom employees of the organization. Another perspective is minimum wage fails to the full-fill social and basic need of people.

All these aspects concerning employees from an ethical perspective have often evolved from a Western view (Banerjee, 2008; Crane and Matten, 2016). However, if we should be able to understand CSR from an employee perspective, we need to consider CSR from an international as well as global perspective, and how we can compare CSR from different geographical areas. I will do this below.

## 2.6 Comparative Corporate Social Responsibility

Above, it was addressed that CSR policy and practice vary between different countries. The literature review so far has demonstrated that this difference exists because for many reasons such as stakeholder interactions, history, government rules and incentives, national context, political system, norms, etc (Matten & Moon, 2008; Fernando & Lawrence, 2015). In some countries, CSR practice is done in an implicit way and in some countries in explicit ways. This can be understood through the CSR communication from various corporations (Matten & Moon, 2008). In an example, the USA formulates CSR policy and practice in an explicit way through formal corporate communication such as reporting, and European countries express CSR policy and practice in an implicit way through institutions like unions for workers. According to Matten and Moon (2008) managers, shareholders and other key shareholders play a significant role to shape the CSR. Highlighting the management role Child (2000) argues that, 'CSR sits in the debate about the convergence and divergence of management practices. Scholars also argue that management plays a different role globally because of the influence of local culture (Hofstede, 1980, Hofstede, 2001).

Although the influence from developed western countries creates homogeneity of CSR notions and practice around the world in a different situation, different countries and by different people see CSR in different ways and strong reasons behind this are economic conditions and business practices (Fernando & Lawrence, 2015). Another reason is, different organizations develop in different market systems, therefore, their business ethics, social relations with the customer, employer-employee roles and responsibilities towards society are different (Matten & Moon, 2008).

Chapple and Moon (2005) said CSR activities differ from one country to another country by national factors and also a finding after doing research on seven Asian countries CSR practices that the variation of CSR practice is not explained by the level of development, but by factors in the respective local business systems. However, in the CSR literature it seems there seems to be some significant difference between developed and developing countries regarding CSR practice. Considering the external factor, developed countries act or disclose their CSR activities from the public pressure, stakeholders, for example; regulators, shareholders, creditors, investors, environmentalists (Patten, 1991; Cormier et al., 2005, Ali et al., 2017). That means in developed countries the public is more aware of CSR issues. However, the scenery is different in developing countries. Developing countries perform their CSR activities from the pressure of international buyers, foreign investors, international media and international regulatory bodies (e.g. the World Bank, United Nations) (Ali et al., 2017). Furthermore, the public pressure seems very low in developing countries which indicates that the public is not aware of CSR issues or are incapable of expressing them. One of the reasons behind this is the absence of CSR reporting regulations of corporations and their implementation is very low in developing countries (Mitchell & Hill, 2009; Belal & Cooper, 2011, Ali et al., 2017).

Reason found that developing countries are playing poor corporate performance because of a lack of motivation regarding CSR and also that they do not have available CSR data (Mitchell & Hill, 2009 Ali et al., 2017). Another reason behind this is costs. The cost of CSR reporting discourages corporation to publish (Belal & Owen, 2007; Mitchell & Hill, 2009, Ali et al., 2017). Nevertheless, some organizations publish their activities in developed

countries to enhance their corporate reputation and their image or to get the prestigious corporate awards (Belal & Owen, 2007; Momin & Parker, 2013, Ali et al., 2017). Some scholars highlight ownership type, government rules, and regulation and religious issues play a major role to perform CSR activities in the developing countries (Rizk et al., 2008, Ali et al., 2017).

Despite all these differentiations it was found that company size, industry category, and corporate governance mechanism appears to drive the CSR reporting in both developed and developing countries. Large companies with a large profit margin have mass visibility in society and they therefore communication more responsibilities towards society and environmental issues than others (Ali et al., 2017). Lastly, considering the situation of developing countries, scholars suggested that policymakers, CSR standardization bodies, and multi-stakeholder initiatives make a good effort to increase CSR activities in developing countries (Ali et al., 2017). In sum, we know that CSR differs between countries, developing and developed countries, as well as between industries.

## 2.7 Corporate Social Responsibility and the Garment Industry

CSR is a very vast and complex concept, and it is hard for stakeholders to gather knowledge of all firms regarding where they buy products (Mohr et al., 2001). In the garment industry, CSR has been particularly focused on the field of fast fashion. Fast fashion companies produce cheap products for their customers where sustainable and ethical issues are not always successfully managed (Lueg et. al., 2015). As CSR has become a strategic part of business, an ethical business organization has a good impact on its stakeholders. Both internal and external stakeholders can play a vital role in the organization's brand image. It is also mentioned in research that a company that maintains strong CSR, has a good brand image, lowers reputational risk and long-term profitability. These are very important aspects related to the business.

Also, the fashion industry market is highly competitive. To maximize profits organizations are looking for a cheap labor rate. Therefore, most of the supplier industries are situated in Asian countries where it is possible to find low-cost labor. Furthermore, according to the fast fashion model, companies are producing low-cost products and launching their products frequently in their stores where the main customer target is young, fashion-oriented consumers who can afford relatively cheap price clothing (Lueg et. al., 2015). Because of high and frequent production, companies give a very tight schedule to their suppliers. In this situation, suppliers give pressure on their workers to finish the work within the deadline. As the deadline is usually so tight that, employees must work overtime which shows unethical practice.

Earlier studies show that in Bangladesh, workers must work 12 to 14-hour days, seven days a week with occasional mandatory 20-hour shifts (M. Taplin, 2014). So here if companies want to ensure ethical issues, then the supplier will not deliver the product on time and if it includes more manpower for work then the profit rate will go down. Therefore, there is a negative relation between the typical industry character and CSR activities in the low-budget fashion industry. Furthermore, suppliers do not cover compliance issues regarding the office

environment. Most of the garments in Bangladesh do not comply with a proper safety system for fire, and have no good sanitary system (M. Taplin, 2014). The reason behind this is the effect of an increase in overhead business costs. Incidents like the one with the Rana Plaza, as taken up earlier in the introduction part, have increased demands on CSR in the global garment industry.

## 2.8 Summary of theoretical perspectives and construction of the conceptual framework

The literature review as outlined above has made it possible to identify relevant concepts and to connect the theory to the research questions and the purpose of the current study. By combining these theoretical understandings, we can conceptualize a conceptual framework guiding me throughout the study (Figure 1). Even if the research purpose is to better understand CSR perspectives by employees in the garment industry of developing countries, the reason for doing this is to contribute the field of *Corporate Social Responsibility in global markets*. This means that CSR in global markets becomes central to the conceptual framework.

For an improved understanding of CSR in global markets, there are several factors important to consider. In Chapter 1 and the introduction, I have identified *CSR perspectives by employees in the garment industry of developing countries* as a central yet missing perception for understanding CSR in global markets. I also argue for that we need to differ between employees in developing and industrialized countries. In order to understand this, I have in the literature review included conceptualizations, theories and views of *Corporate Social Responsibility* and how this varies with different context (Bowen, 1953; Crane and Matten, 2016); Dahlsrud, 2008; Graafland & van de Ven, 2006; Rahman, 2011). By adding knowledge from the field of *stakeholder theory* Evan and Freeman (1993), I have contextualized employees in the garment industry of developing countries. Employees in the garment industry of developing countries have in common with employees in industrialized countries that they base their CSR understanding on *ethics* (Jackson, 1997). I have therefore included ethical perspectives on CSR in general and for employees more specifically. This is something they have in common not only with other employees, but also with other stakeholders of multinational organizations, for instance governments and multinational organizations.

For the comparative purpose of employees in developing countries, related to employees in industrialized countries, I have included perspectives on comparative CSR (Matten & Moon, 2008; Fernando & Lawrence, 2015), including differences in economic development, but also in governance, for instance national government and the institutional framework (Anku-Tsede et al., 2019; Carroll, 1979), for instance legal institutions and how law is difficult to implement in global markets. In order to understand how the industry structure has an important role for CSR in global markets, I have included industrial perspectives on CSR, particularly those in the garment industry (Lueg et al., 2015).

This has led to the framework in Figure 1, suggesting that the current field of CSR in global markets can inform us about central aspects regarding how economic development and

domestic institutions like legal frameworks are important for CSR practices in general. We can also see that transnational organizations are central here when legislation is not fulfilling socio-economic needs in some geographical areas. Here, voluntary governance is central, often based on ethics. This is also how we can understand industrial and corporate arguments for CSR. Altogether, these elements lead to different views on CSR in global markets, in need of coordination to be manageable in practice.

The final and most important perspective in this research is the employee perspective. As I have outlined with the help of the literature review, we know important things based on employee perspectives in industrialized countries but lack similar knowledge from employees in developing countries. This is what I aim to add to this framework with the help of the empirical study for which I shall next describe and argue for in terms of methodology.

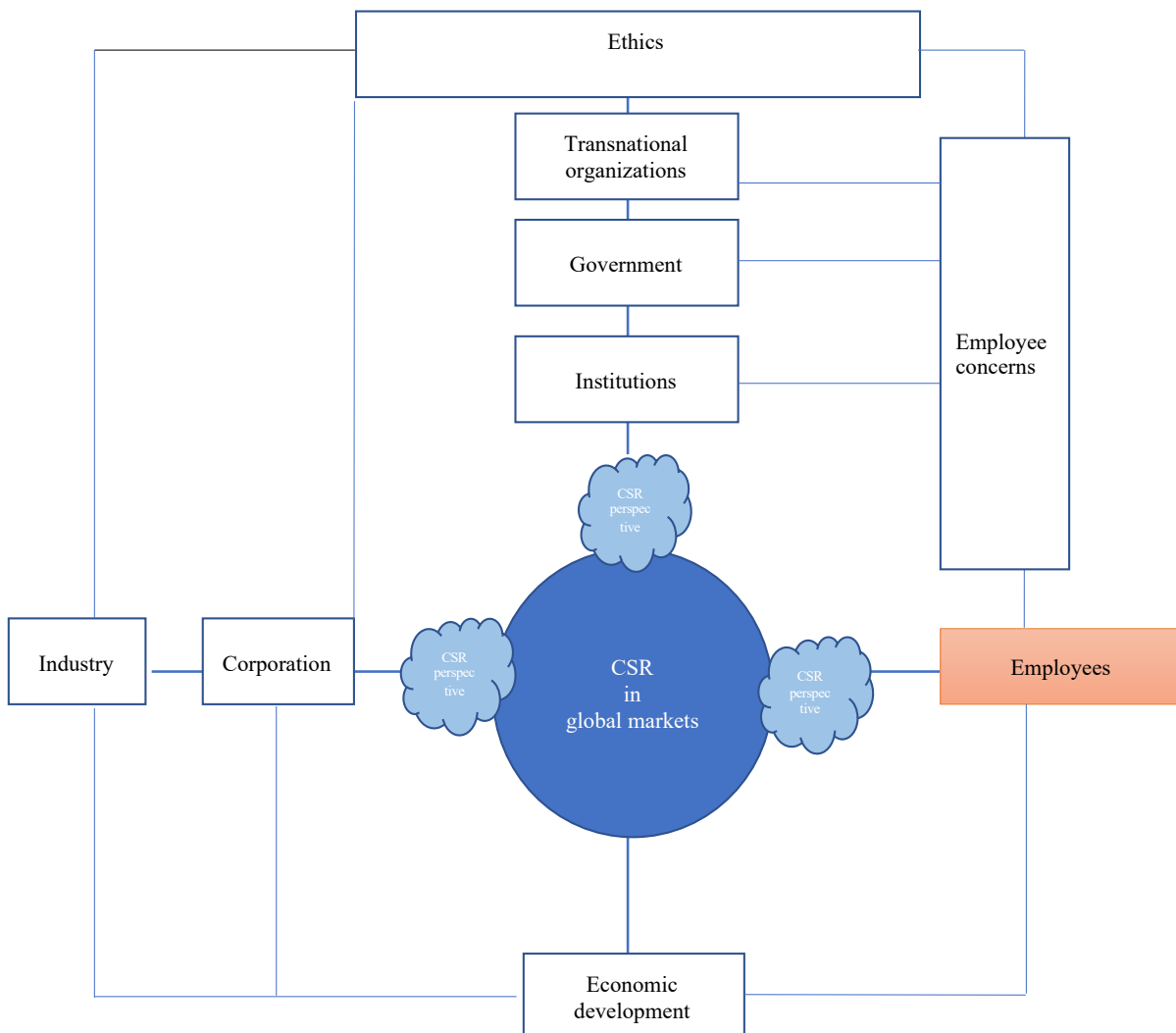


Figure 1. Conceptual framework for exploring CSR perspectives of employees in developing countries in relation to global market

## 3. Methodology

In this section, I will present the methodological process of the thesis by describing the approach I have followed and the justification to select the method. At first, I will highlight the philosophical ground and the research approach of this paper. Second, describe the research process by highlighting the theoretical and conceptual framework. Third, how and where I have collected data, interview design and why I have selected the garments industry of Bangladesh as a case study of the paper. Lastly, present the limitation of this thesis paper.

### 3.1 Research Philosophy

To perform research effectively, research philosophy is an important part to design research. It helps to determine research strategy, research methods and the type of data need to collect (Saunders et al., 2007; Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). A core research philosophy is built upon on ontology (reality) and epistemology (knowledge) perspective. As per definition, ontology is the nature of reality and existence on the other hand epistemology is knowledge perception and which helps to understand the nature of the world (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012).

As aim of this research paper is to find out underlying problems of ethical issues of CSR in the fashion industry from the perception of employees and to understand that, need to recognize different viewpoint and analysis different perspective because CSR has a big arena, and it differs by location, time, organization, and person to person because of different culture, values, and other factors. Therefore, this research philosophy of ontological perspective is relativism because the researcher needs to find out multiple truths and recognize the fact according to different contexts and relativism allows finding facts from the researcher's viewpoint (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015).

To find out the facts, data has been collected through interviews and focus group discussions to understand different views according to the social context of the respondents. The study has chosen the garments industry of Bangladesh as a case study. The epistemological philosophy is constructionism which allows researchers to have a deep understanding of the fact and interpret the research results (Saunders et al., 2007).



## 3.2 Research Approach

Qualitative method is chosen because it explains deeper insight behind any context. My empirical study is to find out employees' perceptions regarding CSR issues on the ethical ground in the garments sector of Bangladesh. As the employee perspective is comparatively unexplored, therefore, to understand the thesis needs in-depth analysis. According to Creswell (2007), a qualitative approach helps to understand complex phenomenon in-depth through the interpretation of experiences and views shared by the respondent. Furthermore, as this study stretch more about employees' feelings, thoughts regarding their moral issues and which is difficult to quantify (Bryman & Bell, 2015). In similar, this study also analysis CSR activities, policies, reports of fashion industries therefore, a qualitative study is preferable for the paper.

## 3.3 Research Process

At the beginning of the research process, a conceptual framework is presented through a literature review. The literature review was selected from different articles, journals, and books. The purpose of the literature review is to identify the previous concept and models regarding CSR, identify the gap in the research, and step by step onward to the findings. In this section, the Carroll four-part CSR model is provided to understand CSR, its main responsibilities, and its major arena. Later ethical issues from employee orientation are described in Crane and Matten's (2016) book 'Business Ethics' and from other journals to give an overview of ethical issues at the workplace. This perception leads to develop a conceptual framework to reach the research question of this thesis.

## 3.4 Research Design

This section described briefly about how the selection of the case study is required and furthermore, which sample method is followed and how data is collected to reach the research purpose of this paper.

As has been taken up in the theoretical part in this study, CSR is a complex issue and has a big arena where CSR practices differ according to geography location. A case study opens up for a detail and intensive analysis of a case, concerned with complexity issues (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Creswell (2007) argues that a case study is a type of design in qualitative research where the researcher can explore detailed, in-depth data collection for the research.

### 3.4.1 Bangladesh Garment Industry as a Case Study

In this paper, CSR from an employee perspective in the Bangladesh garments industry is chosen as a case for various reasons. Bangladesh is an emerging economy country in the

south Asia region and considered as the next eleven emerging markets in the economy due to the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) growth rate is around 7.1 for the last couple of years (Hossain & Alam, 2016). Furthermore, the World Bank and the United Nations (UN) have declared Bangladesh as a developing country in the last year. Despite all the positive progress still, Bangladesh is facing socioeconomic and political challenges to corporate accountability (Hossain & Alam, 2016). According to Belal and Owen (2007), Bangladesh has many problems at the industry level such as child labor, poor working conditions, poor wages rate, less equal opportunity and occupational health and safety issues. To regulate companies, Bangladesh has Companies act 1994 for ownership structure, CEO appointment, and remuneration of the auditors, etc. (Siddiqui, 2010; Hossain & Alam, 2016). Furthermore, it has other regulations such as -the Factories Act, 1965; Payment of Wages Act, 1936; Environmental Protect Act, 1995; Employment and Labour Act, 1965 where social and environmental issues are highlighted clearly but due to corruption and political interference, these laws are not implemented effectively (Hossain et al., 2016; Hossain & Alam, 2016). Considering political interference Hossain et al. (2016) argue that most of the owners of big organizations have directly or indirectly connected with the political parties which protects them from not following the laws and regulations.

Besides rules and regulations, stakeholder roles and accountability in Bangladesh are still in the primary stage. The stakeholder role is very important for effective CSR implementation in the organization, but the evidence did not show any significant role played by the stakeholders in Bangladesh's industries (Hossain & Alam, 2016). One of the reasons behind this is stakeholders such as NGOs, media, civil society, employees, trade unions, and regulatory authorities in Bangladesh are not aware and educated about the organization's social and environmental responsibility through CSR (Hossain & Alam, 2016). Moreover, the organization did not give priority to less economically powerful stakeholders (Belal et al., 2015). Nevertheless, in this situation earlier research found that powerful stakeholders such as international buyers in the export-oriented industry can play a vital role to develop CSR issues in the organization (Hossain & Alam, 2016).

However, if we see an export-oriented organization; the ready-made garments industry (RMG) is the most important industry in Bangladesh. Approximately 5,000 garment factories are currently operating and around four million female workers are doing the job in this sector (Anner & Bair, 2016; Labowitz & Baumann-Pauly, 2015; World Bank, 2017; Huber & Schormair, 2019). But the industry has been facing different ethical problems due to hazardous working conditions, low levels of unionization, a system of subcontracting, corruption, and strong industry associations (Reinecke & Donaghey, 2015; Huber & Schormair, 2019).

Considering the above scenario of Bangladesh, it can be said that Bangladesh needs effective CSR to mitigate different underlying problems at the organizational level and stakeholders such as international buyers can play an important role here. However, though many initiatives have taken still there remains many problems. As most of the research have been done by an organizational viewpoint, therefore an employee perspective on CSR can add values to implement CSR activities effectively.

## 3.5 Data Collection

The study was conducted through a qualitative method data collection process. Data was collected from two types of employee levels. *Workers* who do not have a decision-making role at the workplace and *Operative Managers* who have decision-making ability. This perspective of a two-employee group selection has been chosen to understand different levels of perception.

The data collection was hence made through an information-oriented selection rather than a random selection. An information-oriented selection is made with the perspective of reaching a maximized utility of information from small samples and single cases, where the cases are chosen due to expectations of their information content (Flyvbjerg, 2011). In line with Flyvbjerg (2011), the ambition with this strategy for the selection of cases was to achieve information on unusual cases, as the one with the employee perspective on CSR in developing countries, constructing a deviant case as compared to what is common cases in the existing literature, as outlined in the literature review above. According to Flyvbjerg (2011), this is likely to open up the understanding of limits in the existing theory and the possibility to “develop new concepts, variables, and theories that are able to account for deviant cases”.

### 3.5.1 Focus groups - Workers

For the first employee level, the *Workers*, as described earlier in this section, two focus groups were constructed. Focus Group (FG) is a type of in-depth interview which is conducted in a group (Mishra, 2016). This is a good way to gather respondents from the same backgrounds or experiences to discuss a topic. For both focus groups, one discussion in the form of a focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted. This means that each focus group was participating in a group interview. This resulted in two focus group discussions in total among the *Workers*. The advantage with focus group discussion (FGD) is that respondents can be encouraged to contribute to the discussion of their views with each other, giving ideas with logic since the respondents in such settings often must explain their views (Mishra, 2016). Since it can be difficult for workers to freely express their views (Crane and Matten, 2016), FGDs can be helpful to open up for a discussion in a setting encouraged by group discussions.

Normally, respondents in FGDs are guided by one moderator or a group of moderators to conduct a lively and natural discussion (Mishra, 2016) which helps to get more data about the topic. For the study presented in this paper, the group discussion was conducted by a teacher at BRAC University, Bangladesh. The reason for this was that this teacher from BRAC University was geographically located close to the site of data collection. An alternative would be that I made these group interviews myself through online interviews since I was situated in Sweden and could not make the interviews directly. Hence, this data was not collected by me, the author, directly due to a geographical distance that was too long to overcome otherwise than through online interviews. This was however not possible since the selected group of *Workers* are not familiar with the online interview system. An advantage of the selected moderator (the teacher from BRAC University) was that

this moderator is familiar with the employee perspective and the situation of the *Worker* respondent group. The local moderator was also considered as being trusted by the respondents due to the local character of this moderator. Another advantage was that the moderator speaks the same language as the respondents in the *Workers* group (Bengali).

Every focus group had 6 persons as respondents. This resulted in 12 respondents in total from the group of *Workers*. For the focus groups, fulltime employees of two different garments of Dhaka city (capital of Bangladesh) were selected. The groups were formed considering different age groups to understand their feelings and values based on their experience. Both male and female respondents were selected as an attempt to understand the situation without any gender biases.

The focus group meetings took place at the respective garment factory in Dhaka city and were conducted by an academic scholar from the BRAC University in Dhaka. This was due to practical reasons, since this master's thesis is part of a master program in Sweden, and the employees were situated in Dhaka. An alternative would be internet-based communication such as Skype calls, but since the employees in the garment factory in Dhaka are not used to this kind of communication, it was found more reliable to have a person in place at the factory, conducting the focus group meetings. Having someone conducting the focus group meetings in the factory itself was also understood to create a situation where employees would find it more comfortable to discuss working conditions at their working site. For the same reasons, the focus groups were not filmed. Employees in developing countries are often found to be in a vulnerable situation and may not be willing to speak about working conditions if being filmed. Instead, participants in the focus groups were promised anonymity to increase the reliability of the focus group conversations.

Meanwhile, the focus group conversations were audio-recorded as digital sound files and transcribed. The conversations were made in Bengali, the local language of the employees. All transcriptions were translated into English. To guide the conversations with the focus groups, an interview guide was constructed for the interviewer, the conductor of the focus groups. These questions were based on the research questions as outlined in the introduction, based on the literature review. This resulted in questions focusing on ethical issues between employer and employees as presented in earlier in section 2.5 of the literature review (see table 3.1). The questions were considered more as a guideline for the conductor of the meetings (the interviewer), suggesting the interviewer be flexible and follow the conversation, adding questions when needed, in line with open, qualitative interviews (Bryman and Bell, 2015; Mishra, 2016).

As taken up in section 2.5 of the literature review, these issues are generally considered to be established from a Western point of view. In the interview guide, three questions were therefore added (7, 8, and 9) with the hope to open up a freer discussion of the subject.

Before describing the analysis of the empirical material from the focus group conversations, additional interviews with operatives will be taken up in terms of selection and method of collection.

1. Did you as employees ever find yourself being discriminated in your work?
  - a. Workplace discrimination:
    - i. Due to different characteristics among employees?
    - ii. Performance / qualifications ignored?
    - iii. Race, gender, religion, disability, or nationality?
    - iv. Marital status, physical appearance or gender?
  - b. Sexual or racial harassment:
    - i. gossip, comments or jokes based on your gender, race, sexual orientation?
    - ii. If yes, did it occur in the time of salary fixing, promotion, or job opportunities?
  - c. Equal opportunities and affirmative action:
    - i. Did you find the recruitment process and job criteria fair?
    - ii. Were you provided training programs for personal development in an equal manner?
    - iii. Were you offered a promotion to senior posts?
    - iv. Does your organization have its own policies to avoid discrimination?
2. Do you find yourself having privacy in your workplace?
  - g. Physical privacy:
    - a. Do you have your own space in the workplace? (Any surveillance cameras anywhere?)
  - h. Social privacy:
    - a. Do you find yourself having the freedom to live your private life as per your own choice?
  - i. Psychological privacy:
    - a. Do you find your emotions controlled in the workplace by your employer?
    - b. Do you find yourself having the right to private thoughts and judgment in your workplace?
  - j. Health and drug testing:
    - a. Does your employer take health test of you as an employee?
3. Do you find yourself having employee participation and the right to association?
  - a. E.g. employee union?
4. How do you find your working conditions?
  - a. Safe and healthy environment?
  - b. Canteen facility, day care facility, primary treatment center, rest place, etc.?
5. Do you find yourself having the possibility of a work-life balance?
  - a. Work and non-work activities?
  - b. Time for parenting if needed / wanted?
  - c. Excessive working hours and presenteeism:
    - i. Do you need to work during off-day time, after office time or in times of sickness?
    - ii. What happens if you have children being sick?
  - d. Flexible working patterns?
    - i. For looking after children and families?
    - ii. Have extra allowance or facilities been provided to balance possible problems with unsocial working times?
6. Fair wages:
  - a. Do your wages depend on your employee quality, performance, job importance, or other factors?
  - b. Do you have a minimum wage (fixed by the government)?
  - c. If so, does it full-fill your social and basic needs?
7. What is important for you in your work?
8. How can you be a source of value to your employer?
9. How can your employer be a source of value for you?

Table 3.1. Interview guide for focus group conversations

### 3.5.2 Interviews - Managers

In addition to the focus groups, interviews were made with operative managers from the same organizations as the workers selected for the focus groups conversations. Three interviews with operative managers were conducted via Skype. The reason for selecting operative managers as employee voices is that operative managers are also part of the employees in an organization. However, CSR views from operative managers are often taken up in terms of leadership rather than employee perspectives (e.g. Cantrell et al, 2015; Low and Ang, 2012). In this study, the focus is on operatives as educated employees, a more unusual perspective of employees in developing countries (Banerjee, 2008). As the operative managers interviewed for this project had a higher education than the workers, made it was possible to interview them directly by me, the author of this master thesis, with the help of the internet-based service Skype.

Hence, the interviews for this study were made with employees who are performing an operative role in the same organizations as the workers. For the same reasons as for the workers, the operative managers were given anonymity in the study. To achieve this anonymity, all operative employee names are presented in the numeric figure for their job security purpose. Meanwhile, since the operative managers are employees with degrees from higher education, they are also used to online interview systems, hence the reason why it was possible to do the interviews through Skype. Also, all interviews were conducted in the Bengali language by me, the author of this master thesis. Interviews lasted from 45 minutes to 60 minutes, being recorded with the permission of the respondent and transcribed according to Bryman and Bell's (2015) guidelines for qualitative research. The interviews were then translated into English, also by me, the author of this master thesis.

Since the interview guideline for the focus groups also served well for the interviews with the operative managers (see Table 3.1 above), this interview guideline was used also by me for these interviews. It is particularly the last three questions (7, 8 and 9 in Table 3.1) that are possible to open up for discussions about the situation of employees in the garment industry in Bangladesh. Even though the use of this interview guide was not made for replication purposes (Bryman and Bell, 2015), it helped giving a systematic character to both respondent groups (workers and operative managers). This also increased the credibility to find relevant responses to the research questions of this study, namely how employees in the garment industry in developing countries understand CSR, what their main concerns regarding CSR are, how these concerns differ from concerns among employees in industrialized countries, and how these concerns from developing as well as industrialized countries may also be of a similar character.

### 3.5.3 Validity

‘Validity is concerned with the trustworthiness of the conclusions that are generated from a piece of research’ (Bryman & Bell, 2015). According to Dahlgren et al. (2007), trustworthiness depends on four criteria in qualitative research.

The first is credibility. It refers to the ability to present the actual reality of the research. There are many strategies that I have followed to ensure the research is more credible (Dahlgren et al. 2007). First, I have chosen Bangladesh as my case country as I am native and know the culture and understand the overall context. It helped me to communicate effectively with the respondents and collect data effectively. Furthermore, qualitative data were taken to get an in-depth understanding of the research.

Another technique used to enhance credibility is triangulation. The credibility of qualitative data may be ensured by employing diverse views throughout the data-gathering process to assure that data is suitable (Dahlgren et al. 2007). In this study, the triangulation of the data collection involves conducting interviews with operative managers and workers. Data were also triangulated through using interviews and focus group discussions.

The second is transferability. Transferability refers to the applicability of the results to similar contexts, populations, and phenomena which can be accomplished by a “thick description” of the results from several data collection tools (Dahlgren et al. 2007). In this research, I collected data from two garment factories in Dhaka city whose contexts were almost similar to other places in Bangladesh. Considering the population size, the sample size was small, but we got rich data by conducting interviewing and focus group discussions with operative managers and workers. The findings are quite remarkable, and they can be applied to other garment factories. The results can be used to get an overview, or as a guideline for further research purposes. Also, as this research is based on a qualitative case study, it can be argued that statistical significance can be unclear. However, as this research is of a qualitative nature, exploring unknown phenomena, this study opens up for depth, high conceptual validity, understanding of context and process, as well as the understanding of what causes and the outcomes it may lead to (Flyvbjerg, 2011).

The third is dependability. Dependability is defined as the consistency of findings and detailing the entire research process so other researchers can follow the method and findings (Dahlgren et al. 2007). In our study, to achieve dependability, brief descriptions have been provided of how and why respondents are selected, what methods are followed to collect data, and how the data is analysed.

Fourth is confirmability. In research, confirmability refers to the unbiased nature of the data and results (Dahlgren et al. 2007). To enhance confirmability, our research findings were based on respondents’ responses where there was no potential bias or individual motivations from the researchers. We followed a step-by-step analysis for the qualitative study in order to develop rational and credible research findings.

### 3.5.4 Limitations

The first limitation of this research paper is the very limited time constraints for an individual. By limiting the research task to 10 weeks, the scope is reduced for collecting data and analyzing a problem more broadly and deeply. Additionally, the research was conducted only by me, despite the curriculum being intended for two people. This created some drawbacks, such as a lack of peer feedback, criticism, and collective decision-making. I have compensated for this limitation by discussions with my supervisor and also with fellow students.

The second limitation is that the sample size is relatively small, and the respondents were selected from only two garment industries in Bangladesh although there are hundreds of garments in Bangladesh. Due to the qualitative nature of the study as well as the time and budget limitations, I only choose two garments for this study. This also allowed me to explore in-depth according to the research questions of the study. In addition, respondents are also selected purposively. Qualitative and limited case studies are helpful in areas where knowledge is limited, and where we need to come close to practice for expanding our research into new insights (Flyvbjerg, 2011).

Third, the two focus group discussions were not conducted directly by me because of geographical distance. But it would be better for me if I could be able to conduct interviews with them in person so that would have the opportunity to get more understanding of the problems. An alternative would be that I made these group interviews myself through online interviews since I was situated in Sweden and could not make the interviews directly. Hence, this data was not collected by me, the author, directly due to a geographical distance that was too long to overcome otherwise than through online interviews. This was however not possible since the selected group of Workers are not familiar with the online interview system. The group discussion was conducted by a teacher at BRAC University, Bangladesh. The reason for this was that this teacher from BRAC University was geographically located close to the site of data collection. An advantage of the selected moderator (the teacher from BRAC University) was that this moderator is familiar with the garments industry and has working experience with the employee's working conditions and the situation of the Worker respondent group. I had several discussions with him regarding this study and questionnaires online. He conducted a pilot focus group discussion and discussed with me the constraint of the focus group discussion. After reviewing the transcript of the focus group discussion and considering all the constraints, I instructed him on how to overcome all the gaps and constraints in the focus group discussion. The local moderator was also considered as being trusted by the respondents due to the local character of this moderator. Another advantage was that the moderator speaks the same language as the respondents in the Workers' group (Bengali). It was found more reliable to have a person in place at the factory, conducting the focus group meetings. Having someone conducting the focus group meetings in the factory itself was also understood to create a situation where employees would find it more comfortable to discuss working conditions at their working site. For the same reasons, the focus groups were not filmed. Employees in developing countries are often found to be in a vulnerable situation and may not be willing to speak about working conditions if being filmed. Instead, participants in the focus groups were promised anonymity to increase the reliability of the focus group conversations.

Finally, I conducted interviews with operative managers who are employees with degrees



from higher education, they are also used to online interview systems, hence the reason why it was possible to do the interviews through Skype. But it would be better for me if I could be able to conduct interviews with them in person so that would have the opportunity to get more understanding of the problems.

### 3.6 Method for Analysis

The data analysis was made in two stages. In the first stage, I focused on the employee part of the conceptual framework. This is illustrated in Figure 2 (below). I coded findings in the interviews according to employee concerns regarding main concerns regarding their situations as employees (uncolored square in Figure 2, below), with the main codes of discrimination, privacy, working conditions.

As the first stage of analysis, similarities between employee perspectives on CSR in industrialized and developing countries were considered. These similarities were searched regarding how employees in developing countries express the same type of CSR concerns as we know them from the perspective of industrialized countries (part 2.5 in the literature review of this master thesis). The result of this analysis is outlined in the next part (part 4). As was also taken up in the literature review (in part 2.6) there are however also differences between industrialized and developing countries concerning employee perspectives on CSR. This was also taken up in the analysis in the first stage, leading to results indicating certain similarities between employees in developing and industrialized countries.

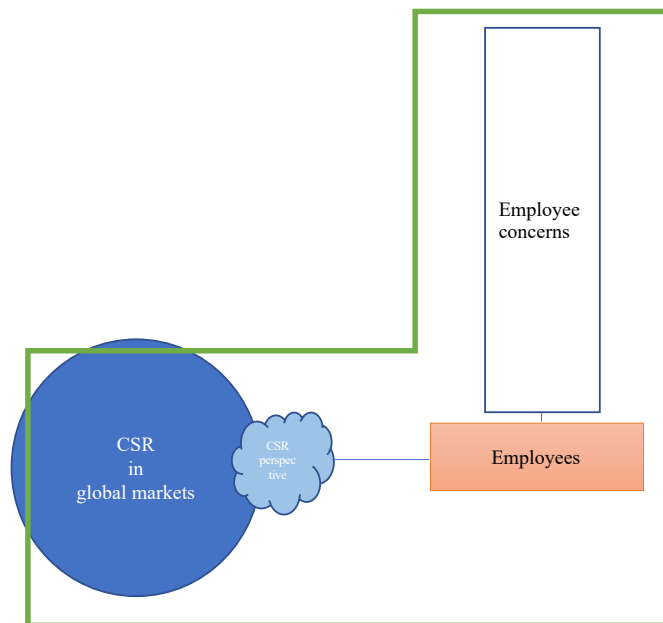


Figure 2. Focus in stage 1 of analysis

In the second stage of the analysis, a comparative analysis was made. This is illustrated by figure 3 (below) and how the rest of the conceptual framework played a role in this part of the analysis. For instance, working and employment conditions in the garment industry were taken into concern, especially those in the Bangladesh garment industry. Many developing countries are today going through many of the same stages that many industrialized countries once went through at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Crane and Matten, 2016), for instance creating economic growth through production in the garment industry, problems with child labor and poverty, etc. However, this does not mean that developing countries of today need to go through all the same stages of development as the industrialized countries did. The BRICs economies (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) are a clear example of this, since

they have had a different path towards industrialization compared to those countries today being categorized as industrialized.

The two-stage comparative analysis opened up for new findings regarding employees' perspective on CSR and its part in CSR in global markets. This will be described in the next chapter treating the results from the study.

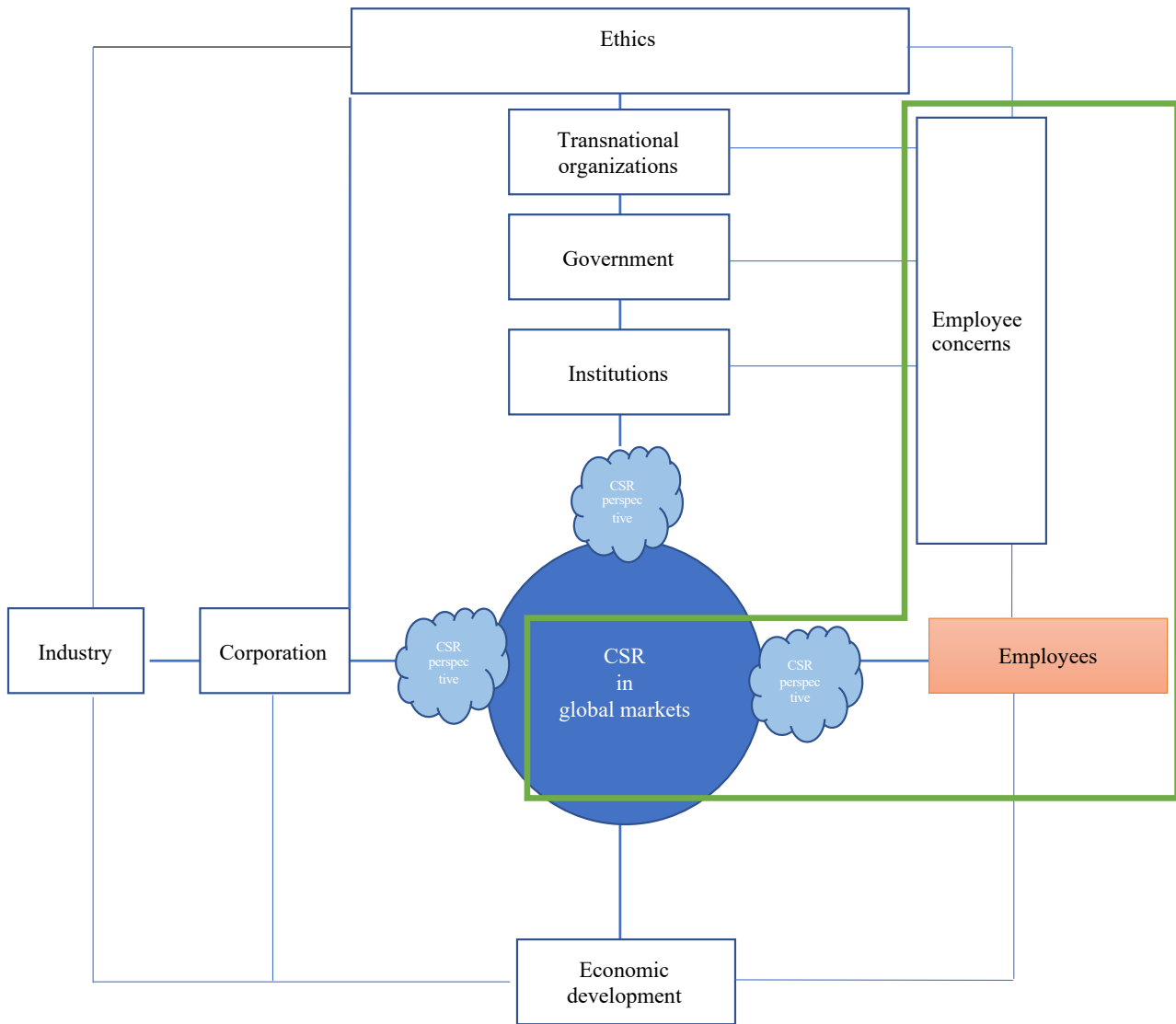


Figure 3. Focus in stage 2 of analysis

# 4 Empirical Material and Findings

As the empirical data was analyzed, it became clear that for reader purposes, it is more relevant to start with research question 2, since this question turned out to inform research question 1. Thereafter follows question 3 and 4 being of a comparative character, as indicated in the purpose of this study. The findings are illustrated with quotes which are collected from interviews and focus group meetings. The empirical data are described under the heading of ethical issues.

## 4.1 Main Concerns Among Employees Regarding CSR

In the first part of the analysis, as outlined above in the method part, the focus was set on exploring the second question as suggested in part 2, the literature review, of this master thesis. This question focuses on the main concerns among employees in the garment industry in developing countries regarding Corporate Social Responsibility. Five themes emerged from the empirical material: working conditions, discrimination, working hours, wages and facilities, and unions and freedom of association. Below I will describe them more in detail.

### 4.1.1 Working Conditions

Ensuring safety and security in the workplace is one of the important CSR issues regarding working conditions for the employees, in line with what was taken up in the literature review in part 2 of this master thesis. Due to earlier safety and security incidents in the garments sector, such as fire problems, building collapse, various measures have been taken in order to prevent this type of incidents in the future. This has been a collective project among both governments and the business sector, for instance through buyers implementing different rules and regulations. Now, factories need to meet compliance issues to get an order from the buyers.

Furthermore, an audit team from the buyers visit factories and check all issues. Without passing the audit inspection, factories will not get an order from the buyer. According to the employees, companies are emphasizing the importance of safety and security strictly. As explained by the Operative-1:

*Our company is an accord alliance certified. We follow all their requirements, and they check time to time. Also, buyers team visit us, and sometimes they send third party inspection team. These inspection teams are both from the domestic and international level. We need to pass all the requirement to get orders from buyers.*

Employees in the study for this master thesis were also telling about how ensuring fire safety, where factories have fire extinguishers at every floor, is important to them. They change every time after the expiry date. Also, there are hosepipes to provide water in time of the fire. Furthermore, the HR department is providing fire drill training frequently. The predetermined team on every floor basis on their role in the time of the fire. Additionally, company-3 use fire door to their factory. If any fire incident takes place, this door will not allow spreading the fire. Both workers and operatives are glad for this setup. As explained by the Operative-2:

*From the previous bad experience, companies are taking measures effectively, such as fire alarms on every floor, water supply, and different exit points in time of the fire. Our HR team is providing training continuously, such as what to do in time of the fire, how to move to the safe zone, and assemble properly.*

Working in an excessively warm place is another health-related issue for workers. In the factory, workers must work in a very warm environment. As many types of machinery items and high voltage lights are used for work; therefore, the temperature at the workplace is very warm. This kind of working condition is not good for the health. Employees at the studied factories sometimes had different understandings of not only health-related working issues but also whether employees are concerned about such issues. For instance, one operative manager (Respondent 3) in the interviews said:

*If we work in the production area, after passing five minutes, we feel very bad. For workers, they become used to it after working a few days, but there is a negative health effect.*

For the workers in the factory, however, it seems that heat can also be a problem. However, workers in the factory participating in the focus groups of this study suggest that it has been a problem historically but is much better today. Hence, as expressed by many of the participants in the focus groups, CSR measures such as improving air quality has been necessary since also workers (of course) are sensitive to high heat and bad air quality, as Respondent 1 in Focus Group 2 said:

*“We have exhaust fans on every floor now, which helps to pass the air. I am working in this industry for more than 25 years and the ventilation situation is 80 percent better than in the old days.”*

#### 4.1.2 Discrimination

Discrimination due to gender was by both workers and operative managers taken up as non-existing in their organization. For instance, one worker in Focus group 2 said:

*We have zero tolerance for gender-based bias. Male or female, every worker is treated for their experience, not for gender.*

Another worker in Focus group 2 illustrated how this was practiced in the company:

*There are many female workers in the company who are a lot more experienced than me, and they are treated accordingly. We are encouraged to respect each other the same from the beginning.*

Hence, in the focus groups, as well as in the interviews with operative managers, the expressed understanding was that there are no problems with gender discrimination. Operative managers seemed to connect this to the leadership of the company. For instance, Respondent 1 in the interviews said:

*We have a strong HR team. It looks after discrimination whole issues, and it takes prompt action against any complaint.*

However, even if gender discrimination by the employees in this study did not appear as a problem in the interviews and focus groups, there was a suggestion of possible processes regarding promotion possibilities that could sometimes be categorized as a form of discrimination. For instance, as Respondent 2 expressed it:

*There are no gender or religious discrimination in my work environment. In my office, each employee respects the other. But personally, I feel there is discrimination depending on the educational institution to some extent. Like someone from the same institute might have a better relationship with seniors from that institute. That might have some effect on increments or promotions sometimes.*

Also, regarding the promotion opportunity, workers feel that there is a very limited opportunity to get a promotion. After many years of work, promotion facility is very low. Though there are some policies for the workers, it takes time and workers who perform very well and become an expert in one section, in that time they got a promotion. As explained by the respondent-1 (FGD-1),

*The promotion chance is very low in the company. I think after working for five years, we deserve a promotion, but we do not get any promotion.*

#### 4.1.3 Working Hours

A third main concern regarding employee CSR, as taken up in the literature review in part 2 of this master thesis, is the concern about working hours, connected to privacy and work-life balance. In the interviews and focus group meetings, it was taken up that at the corporate office, the office hour is 09 am to 05 pm (08 hrs) and in between 01-hour lunch and prayer break. Most of the time operatives must perform extra office work. Operatives' managers said that there are two reasons behind this. As the buyer's office is situated in another location and in another time zone, therefore, to answer some queries, and for some decisions operatives must remain in the office after office time. As explained by interview Respondent-1:

*After office work hours usually, we have to work one to two hours more to meet buyer's queries. In a merchandising job, we need to meet client's requirement. Therefore, we need to communicate every time and wait for approval from buyers.*

Another reason for the extra work is to meet the delivery time. Generally, to maximize sales garments industry take many orders from different buyers. Generally, they take orders more than their production ability. In this situation, the employee needs to work extra after office time. According to the operative's view, there is no provision for overtime pay for the operatives. Therefore, for the extra job, they do not get any remuneration.

Workers must perform extra work regularly. In times of close deadline time, they must work four to five hours after their actual job time. To legalize this issue, the office admin takes an acceptance signature from the workers. Workers also like to perform overtime because they got money for this. On another angle, as their salary is low; therefore, they want overtime to increase their salary. However, in times of work pressure, workers are bound to perform over time. As explained by Respondent-3 (FGD-1),

*In the time of work pressure, we must perform four to five hours of overtime. Currently, it is obligatory to perform the job. Generally, the supervisor does not allow me to take leave or go early currently.*

Regarding their overtime rate, they had some dissatisfaction. Workers stated. A few months ago, their salary was revised, but the basic salary remains the same. As overtime payment depends on basic salary; therefore, their overtime rate remained unchanged.

As per labor, law workers are entitled to 10-days casual leave, 18 days earned leave and 14 days casual leave. But it is difficult to enjoy left. Most of the time, office authority does not allow to enjoy left. Workers have to give effort and show importance reason to get a leave. They have mentioned that it is very difficult to take leave. However, they have to leave encashment benefit. They get money against their unused leave.

However, the operative has no problem getting leave. But they prefer two days weekends as they get one day weekend. Two days weekends can make work and life balance more efficiently. However, sometimes, they need to work on weekends and during their leave time as an organization has no substitute employees.

#### 4.1.4 Wages and Facilities

The fourth main concern regarding employee CSR, as can be found in the literature review in part 2 of this master thesis, is the concern about wages, also suggested as connected to work-life balance issues. In the interviews and focus group meetings, it was clear that the most important noticeable factor for the worker is wages. The government determines the minimum wages of workers. There are seven grades in the pay scale, and the entry-level worker gets monthly 8,000 Bangladesh currency, which is equivalent to 95 US dollar. This salary increases every year. The salary is very low to maintain a minimum standard of life. Workers have to live in a congested and unhealthy environment. Some workers live with their families, but most of them live alone and far from home because living in the capital city is very expensive. An example of this is how one worker in FGD-1 expressed it:

*Wages are very low to fulfill needs in the city.*

Those who are living with their family either both husband and wife are working, or after many years of service, he is earning more salary. Furthermore, all expenses are high in the capital city, and they could not effort to provide good education to their children. So, when the children become adults, parents arrange work at garments. As explained by the Respondent-5 (FGD-1),

*The salary is very poor. We could not maintain our family properly, could not effort many basic demands. On the other hand, the price of commodities has raised enormously but our salary not.*

Single person is living in a hostel house. Where in a small a room they have to share with the four and five people. Every month they send money to their family who is living in the village. Except for some senior workers, most of the workers are not happy with their salary. Therefore, if they find any better salary, they left the job and to join at the new place. Besides the salary, companies provide two festival bonus, attendance bonus, overtime and leave encashment.

Operative workers as employees are getting a salary as per their qualification, length of service, and job demand in the market. Besides the salary, they also prefer other facilities. A



permanent employee gets a monthly salary, two festival bonus, lunch facility, provident fund, insurance, and other facilities. Considering their thoughts, they also prefer to get a salary based on location and cost of a capital city. This was also something operative managers took up, for instance Respondent 1:

*Salary of wage is offered based on experience and quality. According to our company policy, we offer a wage or salary and it varies from one organization to another. I think that on a corporate level, our company provides a good salary. (...) Basically, wages must be allocated based on the area. In Dhaka city, wages vary from area to area. So, when the factory will be situated in a comparatively developed area, wages will be higher than that of lower-costs areas. But a concerning issue is that daily life costing is increasing day by day, but wages are not increasing accordingly.*

The difference between the worker perspective, taken up here, and the operative manager view, is that the operative manager is linking the individual economic situation to a larger, socio-economic environment that can be difficult for a single company to influence.

#### 4.1.5 Unions and Freedom of Association

Fifthly, the research question regarding freedom to participate in unions, connected to employee participation and freedom of association, as also taken up in the literature review, demonstrated that worker union is a representative of a worker who upholds the demand of worker and negotiates with the management team. The workers select this representative for a certain time of period. The ideal union has many responsibilities for the betterment of the worker. In practically, the union is set up by the owners and management team. The procedure is nothing but a formalities management follow to compliance labor law and also to show the buyers. In the time of raising issues, management discusses with the labor union such extra work in the weekend to meet the delivery deadline, but in a critical time, the union is understood as having no power. As explained by the Respondent-4 (FGD-1):

*There is a labor union, which doesn't have any actual power. They can't help any worker in need because they are also a worker and they also need to survive their job.*

While this statement suggests that unions are without any power in this context, it was also proposed that unions were more of a symbolic meaning, for instance when buyers visit the site, something Respondent 2 (FGD-1) said in this way:

*The labor union is only for the show to the buyers.*

For the operative manages, unions appeared of less importance, where respondents took up that Human Resource Management (HRM) team look after all the issue. Employees can discuss and say their problem with HR.

## 4.2 Understanding of CSR Among Employees

### 4.2.1 Employee CSR as Symbolic in a Buying Situation

The empirical material from the current study demonstrated that many employees, independent if they have a management position or a production worker position, share some understandings of employee CSR. As was taken up in part 4.1 above, regarding the main CSR concerns among employees, factory workers and operative managers sometimes had different understandings about what is important for employees in terms of CSR. In the case of how employees understand CSR in general, however, workers and operative managers shared the same understanding. For instance, as was discussed regarding dust and the need for protection when working in dusty areas in the factories, one employee (Respondent 2 – Focus Group 2) said:

*At the workplace, we have dust, and the rule is to wear a mask, but we did not follow properly. One of the reasons is it feels hot. Our supervisor suggests us to wear it, but we take it as our wish. However, it is mandatory to wear a mask in time of visits from buyers or audit team.*

This type of comments also suggests that while operative managers and factory workers may understand some CSR regulation as more important during certain occasions, such as visits from buyers or audit teams, the same CSR regulation may be a technical problem in the everyday working situation, hence seeing it as a flexible regulation that may be needed to open up for a more relaxed application due to practical reasons in the production situation.

### 4.2.2 Employee CSR as Individual Distribution vs. Collective interaction

Another thing that the main concerns among employees regarding CSR demonstrated was that there can also be differences in the understanding of CSR depending on the employee category. For instance, workers part of the production in the garment industry in Bangladesh demonstrated an understanding of employee CSR as something connected to individual distribution, for instance regarding payment and wages. One employee in the form of production worker expressed it in the following way (Respondent 4, Focus group 2):

*We get increments on our salary each year but if we can show good work, our supervisors might make that higher. That is dependent on your work.*

Hence, CSR is here explained as connected to individual distribution of benefits, rather than collectively gained CSR. Operative managers, however, sometimes declared this from a different point of view, as here, with the explanation from Respondent 1 in the manager interviews:

*If we get two days off, it will be very better for us. We will be able to give more time to our families. But as we work in the garments industry, specifically a garments factory, we have to consider lead time for production. You know, production is counted based on an hourly basis. So, keeping the production rate on the right track is our responsibility and managing lead time is very crucial. That's why we give one day weekly off da [to our job].*

In this sense, management as part of employees linked structural limitations to possible employee CSR weaknesses, demonstrating an awareness that some employee CSR policies, like time free from work, could be beneficial on the individual level yet for the sake of collective efforts to promote a good and thriving business climate, they were prepared to sacrifice their individual benefits from employee CSR if they could see collective gains from it.

### 4.3 Similarities in Employee CSR between Developing and Industrialized countries

In the analysis, as outline above, we can see that certain forms of discrimination could be found in this case of CSR in a developing country. This specific form of discrimination was traced to that the alma mater of an employee may be influencing promotion chances, if an employee comes from the same education institution as the manager taking decisions on promotion and advancement in the job situation. However, a CSR employee situation like this is not unique for the context of developing countries. Former studies have demonstrated that this for long has been a habit common also in industrialized countries (see e.g. Mael and Ashforth, 1992).

Another similarity between developing and industrialized countries in terms of employee CSR is the understood value of certifications. In the here presented case study from the garment industry in Bangladesh here categorized as a developing country, both factory workers and operative managers expressed a persistent belief that CSR certifications in terms of employee perspectives are of strong value to employees themselves. This can be understood as a form of standardization of management practices, something that is widely applied in industrialized countries as well (Hahn, 2013) yet also questioned by scholars within the management literature (see e.g. Brunsson et al, 2012).

A third similarity between CSR regarding employees in developing countries compared to the same phenomenon in industrialized countries is that issues with wages is often described as part of a wider socio-economic environment that can be difficult for a single company to influence (see e.g. Cerne, 2019 for this). In line with what can be found in industrialized countries, such structural problems with employee CSR were found necessary to treat with the help of governments and unions.

Hence, in the study, three types of employee CSR were found as rather similar between industrialized and developing countries; discrimination, the use of certifications, and wages.

While these are important similarities, also significant differences between industrialized and developing countries were found in the study presented here. I will outline them in the next session.

## 4.4 Differences in Employee CSR between Developing and Industrialized Countries

One important aspect of the analysis was to find out possible specificities for developing countries in terms of employee CSR in comparison to industrialized countries. Three major differences were found, illustrated in Figure 4. These differences were both concerning the level between the industry and the corporation, as well as in direct relation to the employee perspectives influenced by the context of being situated in a developing country. These differences are illustrated by the two red frames in Figure 4 and are extending the conceptual framework. This is explained next.

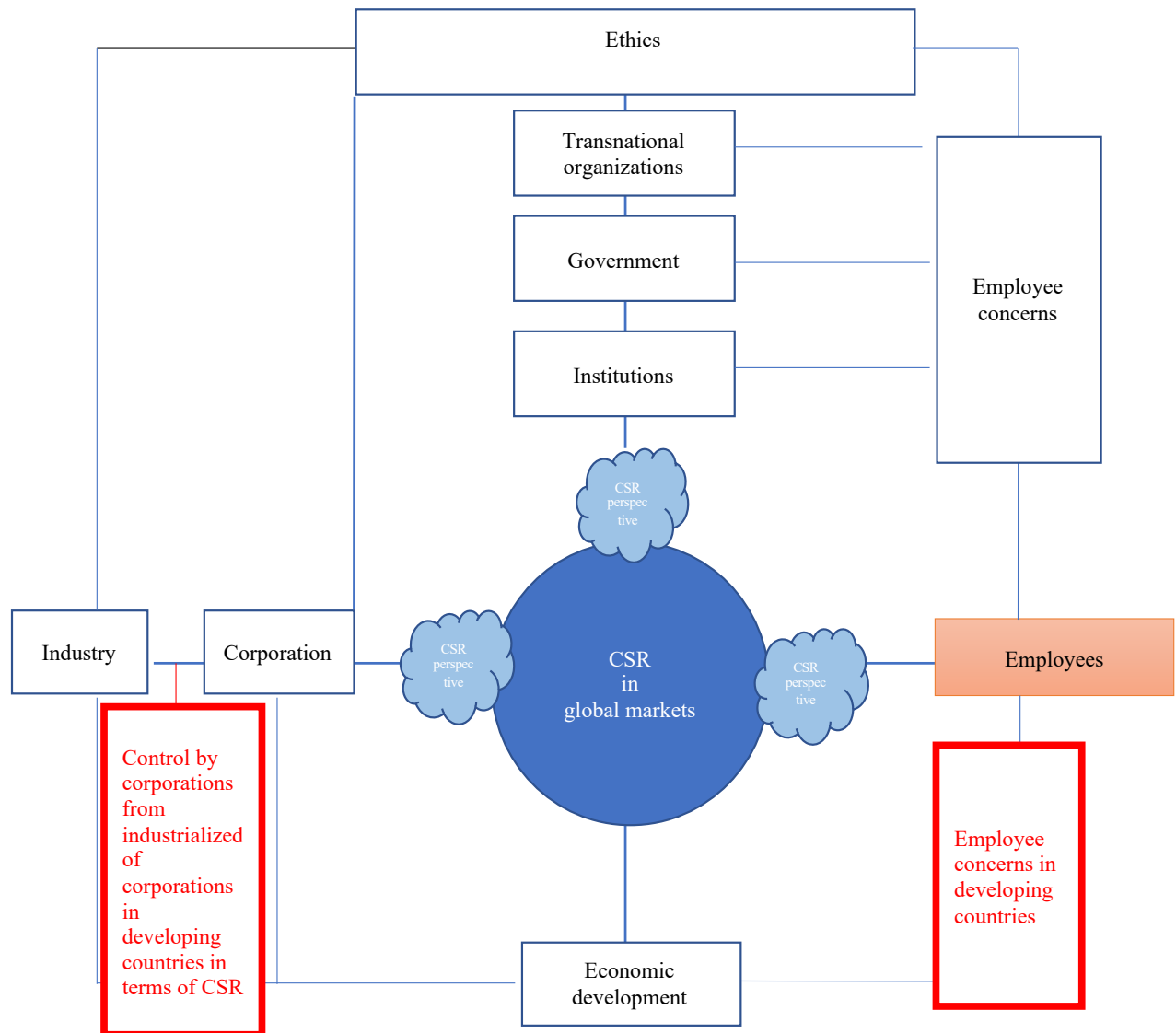


Figure 4. Contribution to the conceptual framework

One of the differences between developing and industrialized countries regarding employee CSR is that in industrialized countries it is less common that global buyers control local sellers regarding employee CSR such as safety, discrimination, working hours or wages as a condition for placing and order. In the current study, this was however seen as normal for the employees at the studied site. Thereby it was also understood as normal that employees participate in the auditing of the factories through answering questions from external audit teams. This is not something that has been found of common practice in employee CSR in industrialized countries.

A second difference between developing and industrialized countries is how employees in the study presented here express that they do not see any discrimination based on gender. As was outlined in the literature review of this master thesis, it is common that employees in industrialized countries raise the issue of gender discrimination in working places as part of employee CSR. It is of course both possible and likely that gender discrimination does occur in developing countries, yet not apprehended or admitted as such among employees in these countries. Nevertheless, in the study being subject to analysis here, respondents found their work place being free from gender discrimination.

A third difference that the results from the study indicate is that there may be differences in how employees in developing countries relate to working hours and what they in this study expressed as reasons for working overtime. In this study, employees expressed an understanding for why there were reasons to work overtime, for instance an order that had been placed and needed a certain delivery time despite the lack of employees who could deliver within the limits of ordinary working hours, and therefore working overtime was suggested the only way for achieving the collective goal of a certain delivery date. This is also a difference from how we know employee attitudes toward working overtime according to the literature study of this master thesis. It should be noted that this may still make overtime understood as a problem for employee CSR, yet differently expressed in this study compared to other studies of employee CSR in industrialized countries, as demonstrated in the literature review.

In sum, the study has therefore found differences in employee CSR between developing and industrialized countries as having the same amount of similarities as they have differences. This opens up for further considerations regarding employee CSR in developing countries, something that will be discussed in the last part of this master thesis, being presented next.

# 1. Discussion and Conclusion

This study started out from the purpose to explore and analyze new and unique data for the understanding of how employees in the garment industry placed in developing countries express their understandings of Corporate Social Responsibility. The purpose was also to find out what the main concerns in terms of Corporate Social Responsibility are as stated by employees in this industry, as well as finding possible differences and similarities between how CSR may be expressed in developing countries compared to what we know about it as an occurrence in industrialized countries.

While the latter understanding was outlined in a literature review part of this study, the former view of CSR among employees in developing countries was illustrated with the help of a case study with unique, empirical material collected and analyzed in line with the above stated purpose. The empirical material was collected through the design of a case study where employees in the form of workers as well as managers were expressed their views of CSR from their employee perspective. Due to an inductive approach to the empirical material, the findings made it relevant to start with the main concerns of the employees. This was due to the fact that through the expression of concerns, it was made clear also how the employees understand CSR as a concern for employees.

The results from the study suggests that employees in developing countries are mainly concerned with working conditions, discrimination, working hours, wages and facilities, and unions and freedom of association as forms of employee CSR. In terms of how employees in the garment industry, part of developing countries, mainly understand CSR, the current study suggests that employee CSR is mainly understood as symbolic in a buying situation, hence something that should be demonstrated and verified for audit reasons. Another understanding of employee CSR in developing countries was that it may be found in how well different individuals work, for instance by a raise in salary, while it may also be an effort of collective action where many employees must work together towards the responsibility to deliver something they have promised to a market.

Some of these findings resulted in the understanding that we can find some similarities between industrialized and developing countries while there are also differences between these types of countries. From the perspective of similarities between developed and developing countries, results from the study suggested that educational history can be of importance for promotional possibilities, something we know has been found also in developed countries (Mael and Ashforth, 1992). A second similarity in employee CSR between developing and developed countries found in the empirical study for this master thesis was the understanding that CSR must be standardized if possible to manage. We know from former studies within the field of management that this is a common view also in industrialized countries (Hahn, 2013), and that we may want to question this (Brunsson et al, 2012). A third similarity between developing and developed countries in terms of employee

CSR in the findings of the current study was that of wage issues and how these are often part of a wider, socio-economic context being difficult for individuals to influence and change, thus suggesting the freedom of associations as particularly important for employee CSR both in developing and developed countries.

Despite these similarities between developing and developed countries, as suggested by the findings of this study, also differences between developing and developed countries in terms of employee CSR were found. One difference between employee CSR in developing countries compared to developed countries is the seemingly accepted practice among global buyers to control local sellers for employee CSR, for example safety, discrimination, and working hours. This is a practice that is not common in developed countries where relationships between buyers and sellers are expected to be based on more established, mutual trust (cf. Doney and Cannon, 1997; Selnes, 1998). A second difference between developing and developed countries in terms of employee CSR is that gender is understood as not being an issue of employee CSR. As mentioned before, it is both possible and likely that gender issues exist also in developing countries, thus being part of employee CSR. Yet, the approach appears to be differently met when discussing it in terms of employee CSR. The third difference between developing and developed countries regarding employee CSR as part of the results from the study is how employees in developing countries in interviews expressed a stronger sense of solidarity with the employer regarding working overtime. This is different from how employees in developed countries have been understood (cf. Berg et al, 2003; Fenwick and Tausig, 2001; Golden and Wiens-Tuers, 2005). In developing countries, working overtime has been understood more in terms of how this can lead to problems with health among employees, rather than how employees may see this as a way to contributing to the collective good.

## 5.1 Contributions

The results from the study have led to some contributions of theoretical, practical, and societal character. Below, I shall discuss each of them separately.

### 5.1.1. Theoretical Contributions

As has been discussed above, the results from this study have suggested existing differences in CSR between employees in developing and developed countries. With the help of an analysis of new and unique, empirical material from the case study focusing on parts of the Bangladesh garment industry, this study has helped nuancing the perspective on employee CSR in developing countries. This has been made by comparing the empirical results to earlier studies on employee CSR in developed countries, bringing forward not only differences but also common views on employee CSR. In this perspective, it has also been importance to find out main concerns regarding CSR among employees in this case study of employee CSR in the Bangladesh garment industry. By doing this, the results from this study contributes with the insight that employees in developing countries may have both similar concerns regarding CSR as employees in developed countries, yet also important differences can be found.

Hence, this study has demonstrated the relevance of taking into concern a more nuanced selection of employees. Employees in developing countries are not just workers in factories, as the CSR literature often is suggesting (cf. Costa & Menichini, 2013; Greenwood, 2008; Lynch-Fannon, 2004), but also managers, making differences and similarities, thus comparative studies, possible and relevant between blue collar and white-collar views of employee CSR. While this study is too limited to make meaningful conclusions in important differences between workers and managers, we can from the current study still see that there are possible varieties of CSR among employees, making it a relevant area to study in the future.

The current literature has brought forward the importance of employee CSR in developing countries (cf. Cutler, 2006; Utting, 2000; DeWinter, 2001; Detomasi, 2007), as taken up in the literature review in this master thesis. However, the current view is rather limited, suggesting differences between countries but not necessarily similarities between developing and developed countries. As the results from the study in this master thesis suggest, it is important to understand differences between not only countries but also how we categorize countries like developed and developing, and how the understanding of employee CSR in these categories of countries may not only differ but also find common aspects in their search for CSR on global markets. The study presented here is a first step towards that direction.

In sum, this study has provided a more comprehensive understanding of how Corporate Social Responsibility is understood and being of concern to employees in global garment markets. Thereby it has contributed with a more complex view of Corporate Social Responsibility on global markets regarding the employee perspective, and can therefore be understood to contribute to the theoretical field of marketing and Corporate Social Responsibility on global markets. Meanwhile, this study is limited in the parts it covers from the perspective of Corporate Social Responsibility as part of global markets and perspectives on developed and developing countries, studying only a limited part of global markets as well as the Bangladesh garment industry. However, the perspectives taken up in this study opens up for further studies, including more parts of the Bangladesh garment industry, but also what it looks like in other geographical areas categorized as developing countries. Moreover, the study presented in this master thesis also suggest that we take other industries into concern, since there are many industries working globally on markets involving developing countries in their value chains. This would help us to increase our understanding of this field further, and it would also make a necessary contribution to the extension of the scholarly field of Corporate Social Responsibility on global markets.

### 5.2.2. Practical Contributions

The study presented here has not only theoretical contributions. Corporate Social Responsibility with regard to employees is already a well-established practical field in marketing. This study has important contribution to this practical field as well. For instance, as the literature review in this master thesis has demonstrated, it is a common understanding that Corporate Social Responsibility should be standardized in order to be manageable. Yet, as the analysis of the empirical material of the current study also demonstrates, such standardizations can also be part of particular management problems with Corporate Social Responsibility, for instance that standardized visits are not always helpful to understand



everyday situations regarding employee Corporate Social Responsibility and how to better handle them in the future.

By nuancing the understanding of employee CSR globally, particularly from a comparative view of differences between developing and developed countries, but also differences between various categories of employees, it is likely that practitioners may understand not only how to consider employee CSR in their daily practices on global markets, but also why it is important to handle them in certain ways.

Thereby the results from the study presented here have been able to find contributions to practitioner understandings of how to better comprehend Corporate Social Responsibility from an employee perspective on global markets, including both developing and industrialized countries.

## 5.2 Conclusion

Employee perspective CSR issue is not an ignoring part anymore. It can be used well enough to analysis and get a different perspective, which can give a competitive advantage to the organization. Fashion industries need to observe employee view effectively, which will help a company to find out real problems and solve accordingly. Similarly, companies can avoid any unwanted situation which can create damage to companies' reputation and spread to their customers. Evaluating the findings of empirical research of this paper, fashion companies should not only focus on minimum wage policy; rather, the company should take concern about other aspects deeply.

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