



Does perceived corporate social responsibility decrease organizational cynicism? A social identity perspective

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Policies related to corporate social responsibility (CSR) can positively impact both businesses and organizational members. However, the potential outcomes of situations where employees perceive inconsistencies between their organization's CSR and other practices remain poorly understood. Using social identity theory, we administered 310 surveys to employees in various organizations to examine how employees' perception of CSR practices affects their organizational cynicism, incorporating the moderating effects of self-sacrificial leadership, perceived organizational justice, and perceived organizational support. The results showed that when self-sacrificial leadership, perceived organizational justice, and perceived organizational support were high, negative perceptions of CSR intensified organizational cynicism. The findings provide a theoretical contribution to the literature on CSR, as well as guidance for managerial practices.

Keywords

perceived corporate social responsibility, self-sacrificial leadership, perceived organizational support, perceived organizational justice, organizational cynicism

Article Highlights

- This study explored the effect of corporate social responsibility (CSR) on organizational cynicism using social identity theory.
- High levels of self-sacrificial leadership, perceived organizational justice, and perceived organizational support intensified cynicism when CSR perceptions were low.
- Even among employees with high perceptions of CSR, perceptions of low levels of self-sacrificial leadership, organizational justice, and organizational support increased cynicism.
- Organizations risk fostering cynicism if they emphasize one aspect of employee perceptions over a balanced approach in CSR implementation.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a policy involving fair engagement with the external environment (Rupp et al., 2013) that prioritizes the satisfaction of diverse stakeholders surrounding the company. CSR has been shown to have a positive impact on all parties involved, including organization members (Paruzel et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2020). Previous research has indicated that after the implementation of CSR policies, employees tend to exhibit higher levels of organizational commitment (Brammer et al., 2007; Erdogan et al., 2015), job satisfaction (Glavas & Kelley, 2014), and organizational citizenship behavior (Farooq et al., 2017), as well as decreased turnover intention (Hansen et al., 2011) and cynicism (Serrano Archimi et al., 2018; Sheel & Vohra, 2016). Although the current literature indicates there is a positive relationship between employee attitudes and CSR policies, complex circumstances remain poorly

understood. For example, other psychological factors that are known to foster positive reactions may be inconsistent with perceptions of CSR implementation if employees notice leaders steadfastly prioritizing their interests over those of the organization (i.e., low self-sacrificial leadership), feel a significant lack of support from a company (i.e., low perceived organizational support), or perceive an organization that has active CSR policies as unjust (i.e., low perceived organizational justice).

When CSR aligns with moderating factors like perceived organizational support, self-sacrificial leadership, and perceived organizational justice, they may reinforce each other, reducing organizational cynicism. In contrast, individuals may develop cynicism as a defense mechanism in inconsistent situations (Meyerson, 1990). Therefore, we investigated the interplay of these factors in this paper.

The Current Study

Perceived Corporate Social Responsibility and Social Identity Theory

One of the key mechanisms explaining the positive effect of employees' perceived CSR is social identity theory (De Roeck et al., 2014; Gond et al., 2017), which views *identity* as individuals' perception of belonging to a social category or group (Abrams & Hogg, 1988). According to this theory, individuals can develop positive identities through aligning with organizations that also have positive identities (Dutton et al., 1994; Tajfel & Turner, 2004), which could explain the link researchers have found between CSR (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012) and organizational identification (Collier & Esteban, 2007; Gond et al., 2017; Paruzel et al., 2021). Thus, when organizational identity is threatened, individual identities are also affected (Elsbach & Kramer, 1996). Hence, the perception of implementing CSR policies contributes to a positive organizational identity, which, in turn, has a positive impact on individual identity and the development of self-esteem or self-worth (Gond et al., 2017). Researchers have found that organizational identification plays a crucial mediating role between perceived CSR and individual outcomes (Jones, 2010; Paruzel et al., 2021). However, social identity theory can also be used to explain how diverse perceptions within an organization can generate ambivalent psychological states. Adopting the perspective of social identity theory to investigate the influence of perceived CSR on individual reactions enables analysis of the effects of additional variables as well, such as self-sacrificial leadership (De Cremer, 2006), perceived organizational support (Edwards & Peccei, 2010), and perceived organizational justice (Blader & Tyler, 2009).

Organizational Cynicism and Social Identity Theory

Cynicism is a form of self-defense that involves distancing oneself from a complicated or dissonant situation (Abraham, 2000; Maslach & Leiter, 2008). *Organizational cynicism*, which is prevalent in modern society (Bommer et al., 2005), refers to a negative attitude characterized by frustration and disillusionment (Andersson & Bateman, 1997) that is directed toward an organization by its members (Dean et al., 1998). As can be inferred from the definition, studies have reported on the negative impact of organizational cynicism on various outcomes, including organizational citizenship behavior, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intention (Andersson & Bateman, 1997; Chiaburu et al., 2013). In addition, researchers have shown that role conflict (Simha et al., 2014), distrust toward leaders (Kannan-Narasimhan & Lawrence, 2012), and psychological contract violation (Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2003) increase perceptions of unfavorable situations and subsequently cynicism (Wilkerson et al., 2008). In this study we considered organizational cynicism as our dependent variable in our investigation of paradoxical workplace circumstances.

One potential antecedent of organizational cynicism is a low level of perceived CSR (Serrano Archimi et al., 2018; Sheel & Vohra, 2016). Sheel and Vohra (2016) explained this relationship using signaling theory, suggesting that cynical attitudes could change if individuals receive information that makes an organization seem attractive. Although perceived CSR can build a positive image of the organization, thereby fostering organizational identification among employees, it can be inferred that the degree of identification will be reduced when perceived CSR is low. Since cynicism is a state of disappointment and psychological distance from an organization (Maslach & Leiter, 2008), it can also be interpreted as reflecting a lower level of organizational identification. Therefore, we proposed the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Perceived corporate social responsibility will be negatively related to organizational cynicism.



Self-Sacrificial Leadership

Self-sacrificial leadership refers to a leadership style that prioritizes the collective interests and well-being of followers over the leader's own interests (Choi & Mai-Dalton, 1999; De Cremer & Van Knippenberg, 2004). Numerous researchers have argued that leaders exhibiting self-sacrificial behaviors inspire and serve as role models for organizational members, thereby exerting positive influences and affecting members' self-conception (Choi & Mai-Dalton, 1999; De Cremer & Van Knippenberg, 2004; Halverson et al., 2004; Yorges et al., 1999). Self-sacrificial leaders demonstrate high leadership effectiveness by building trust with subordinates, enhancing their loyalty, and fostering both group development and organizational identification, particularly in uncertain situations (De Cremer, 2006; Van Knippenberg & Van Knippenberg, 2005). In addition, their self-sacrificial actions alleviate subordinates' psychological stress and emotional exhaustion (Bai et al., 2023). As a result, employees working underneath self-sacrificial leaders in organizations that effectively implement CSR policies are likely to have low levels of cynicism; however, the inverse may be true when employees perceive a low level of CSR. In such situations, individuals might view these leaders with a sense of pity for being in an unfavorable organizational environment or question the authenticity of their self-sacrificial behaviors, exacerbating organizational cynicism. Therefore, we proposed the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Self-sacrificial leadership will moderate the negative relationship between perceived corporate social responsibility and organizational cynicism.

Perceived Organizational Support

Perceived organizational support is a well-established concept in the field of organizational behavior that associates members' positive responses with their perception that their organization values their contributions and well-being. By believing that their organization cares about them, members attribute human-like characteristics to their workplace and develop an enhanced sense of attachment and identification (Eisenberger et al., 1986, 2001). Numerous empirical studies have examined the relationships between perceived organizational support and variables such as organizational satisfaction, commitment, performance, turnover intention (Rhoades et al., 2001), and organizational identification (Edwards & Pececi, 2010). When employees perceive that their organization supports them and also effectively implements CSR, they are likely to strengthen their identification with the organization. However, if the two factors are inconsistent, the situation will cause strain, resulting in cynicism (Wilkerson et al., 2008). While individuals who perceive a high level of perceived organizational support alongside low CSR may experience favorable situations personally, they will also experience cognitive dissonance and subsequently psychological stress. Although perceived organizational support can protect against psychological strain (George et al., 1993), it may also intensify their disappointment toward the organization in inconsistent situations. In contrast, in situations where CSR perceptions are high while perceived organizational support is low, individuals may be cynical about the organization's CSR initiatives, potentially perceiving the firm as hypocritical. Therefore, we proposed the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Perceived organizational support will positively moderate the negative relationship between perceived corporate social responsibility and organizational cynicism.

Perceived Organizational Justice

Similar to perceived organizational support, there is consensus in the literature that perceived organizational justice elicits positive responses from organizational members (Colquitt et al., 2001). Perceptions of organizational fairness contribute to increased job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and other favorable reactions among employees, increasing their attachment to the organization (e.g., Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001). According to the looking in and looking out argument (Rupp, 2011), organizational justice and CSR are closely intertwined, with perceived CSR representing the outward-facing aspect of organizational justice. This is consistent with research linking CSR to identification (Jones, 2010; Kim et al., 2010) and organizational justice to identification (Blader & Tyler, 2009; Tyler & Blader, 2003). Hence, when both perceived organizational justice and CSR perceptions are high and positive, the combined effect is expected to be stronger compared to considering only one factor (Rupp et al., 2013). However, a lack of alignment between the two variables is likely to cause significant dissension among organizational members. Therefore, we proposed the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: Perceived organizational justice will positively moderate the negative relationship between perceived corporate social responsibility and organizational cynicism.

Method

Participants and Procedure

We distributed 572 online surveys to employees from various firms in Shandong and Guangdong Provinces in China between March and April 2023. Prior to the recruitment of participants, we informed the managers of companies in these regions about the purpose of the survey and obtained their consent as well as that of the participants. We collected survey responses using an online survey platform and provided compensation for participation in the form of a credit of CNY 5 (approximately USD 0.70) applied to their telephone accounts. As exclusion criteria, we identified and screened surveys exhibiting an abnormal pattern, specifically those with identical responses for nine or more consecutive items (DeSimone & Harms, 2018; Meade & Craig, 2012; Schonlau & Toepoel, 2015). Many responses displayed insufficient effort, which we attributed to the impersonal nature of administering surveys online. Out of 572 distributed questionnaires, we removed 262 due to excessively repetitive patterns (DeSimone & Harms, 2018), resulting in 310 valid responses (effective recovery rate = 54.2%).

Among the 310 participants who returned valid responses, 70.0% were women and 30.0% were men. Participants' ages ranged between 20 and 50 years old. The mean age was 27.5 years ($SD = 6.57$), with only 8.7% of respondents being aged 40 or above, while 22.9% were in their 30s. Regarding level of education, 71.9% of respondents had a college degree and 22.9% had earned up to a high school diploma. As the majority of respondents were young, most had been in their organization for a relatively short period: 65.8% had worked for their company for less than 5 years, while 12.8% had been with their organization for more than 20 years. Regarding workplace characteristics, the majority (43.5%) belonged to companies less than 5 years old, while 41.9% of companies had been established for 10 years or more. Among the respondents, 22.9% worked for large companies with over 1,000 employees, while 26.5% worked for small companies with fewer than 100 employees.

Measures

All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). To account for potential issues arising from cultural and linguistic differences, the questionnaires' validity was ensured through iterative translation with native speakers of both Chinese and English. First, the English items were translated into Chinese to ensure natural expression. Next, the Chinese version was translated back into English and compared with the original items for consistency. This iterative process was repeated twice to obtain the final version of the survey.

Perceived Corporate Social Responsibility

To measure perceived corporate social responsibility, we used Turker's (2009) 17-item scale, which comprises four dimensions: economic responsibility (four items), legal responsibility (five items), ethical responsibility (six items), and philanthropic responsibility (two items). Sample items analyzing key facets of legal and ethical CSR are "Does the company employ child labor?" and "Does the company foster an ethical work environment?" We moved the item discussing minimum wage, which was originally included in the economic responsibility dimension, to the legal dimension because the minimum wage is set by law in China, where our study took place. Cronbach's alpha values for the legal and ethical dimensions were .83 and .85.

Self-Sacrificial Leadership

We used five items from the measure developed by De Cremer and Van Knippenberg (2004) to assess self-sacrificial leadership. Sample items are "My leaders are willing to give up certain privileges for my group" and "My leaders are willing to meet up with their team members in their own time." Cronbach's alpha in this study was .91.



Perceived Organizational Support

Perceived organizational support was measured using a four-item short version of the scale originally developed by Eisenberger et al. (1986). Sample items are “The company values my goals and values” and “The company cares about me very much.” Cronbach’s alpha in this study was .87.

Perceived Organizational Justice

Perceived organizational justice was measured using five items from the scale of Colquitt et al. (2001). Given the overall scope of organizational justice in this study, items were selected to encompass each dimension of justice: procedural, interpersonal, informational, and distributive. Sample items are “Based on my performance, I am reasonably paid” and “The company clarifies decisions and provides additional information, especially when employees have questions.” Cronbach’s alpha in this study was .88.

Organizational Cynicism

Brandes et al. (1999) developed a three-dimensional measure of organizational cynicism, comprising cognitive, affect, and behavioral dimensions. We used one or two items to assess each dimension. Sample items are “Company policies, goals, and practices are often inconsistent” and “The thought of the company makes me nervous and anxious.” Cronbach’s alpha in this study was .79.

Control Variables

We controlled for gender, age, education level, and organizational tenure, as these demographic characteristics are known to be related to organizational cynicism (Chiaburu et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2020). Since the data were collected from employees of various organizations, it was considered necessary to exclude other influences due to the characteristics of the company. Therefore, the age and size of the firm were also incorporated as control variables.

Data Analysis

We used STATA version 16.1 for data analysis and conducted a confirmatory factor analysis using maximum likelihood estimation to examine the construct validity of the latent variables.

Results

Measurement Model and Common Method Variance

As seen in Table 1, the full measurement model with six latent variables was found to be the most suitable. The five-factor model, which merged perceived CSR along with legal and ethical CSR into one factor, had a weak comparative fit index and Tucker–Lewis index, and the root-mean-square error of approximation was only marginally acceptable. The four-factor model, which additionally merged perceived organizational support and perceived organizational justice into one factor, and the three-factor model, which considered all moderation variables as one factor, also showed poor fit indices, as did the two-factor model, in which cynicism was separate and all other variables were merged.

Table 1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results

Models	χ^2/df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
A: Six-factor model ^a	1.9916	.940	.933	.057	.098
B: Five-factor model ^b	2.7390	.894	.882	.075	.074
C: Four-factor model ^c	3.5216	.844	.829	.090	.074
D: Three-factor model ^d	4.2800	.795	.777	.103	.079
E: Two-factor model ^e	5.6443	.708	.684	.123	.097
F: One-factor model ^f	7.2567	.606	.575	.142	.121

Note. CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis index; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation; SRMR = standardized root-mean-square residual.

^a Cynicism, Legal corporate social responsibility, Ethical corporate social responsibility, Self-sacrificial leadership, Perceived organizational support, Perceived organizational justice; ^b Cynicism, Legal corporate social responsibility + Ethical corporate social responsibility, Self-sacrificial leadership, Perceived organizational support, Perceived organizational justice; ^c Cynicism, Legal corporate social responsibility + Ethical corporate social responsibility, Self-sacrificial leadership, Perceived organizational support + Perceived organizational justice; ^d Cynicism, Legal corporate social responsibility + Ethical corporate social responsibility, Self-sacrificial leadership + Perceived organizational support + Perceived organizational justice; ^e Cynicism, Legal corporate social responsibility + Ethical corporate social responsibility + Self-sacrificial leadership + Perceived organizational support + Perceived organizational justice; ^f Cynicism + Legal corporate social responsibility + Ethical corporate social responsibility + Self-sacrificial leadership + Perceived organizational support + Perceived organizational justice.

Correlation Analysis

We tested for common method bias using Harman’s single-factor test (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986; Podsakoff et al., 2003). One factor explained 38.2% of the variance and six factors explained 70.0%, indicating that common method bias did not seriously affect this study. Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics and correlations of the variables.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Study Variables

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Cynicism	2.242	0.731	1											
2. Legal CSR	4.251	0.764	-.239***	1										
3. Ethical CSR	3.659	0.769	-.297***	.543***	1									
4. SSL	3.199	0.827	-.181**	.248***	.595***	1								
5. POS	3.202	0.793	-.105	.250	.615***	.380***	1							
6. POJ	3.306	0.725	-.182**	.314***	.666***	.671***	.727***	1						
7. Gender	0.300	0.459	.171**	-.008	-.115*	.004	-.051	-.055	1					
8. Age	27.455	6.567	-.088	.347***	-.082	-.123*	-.117*	-.146*	.134*	1				
9. Education	1.829	0.521	-.042	-.069	-.062	-.044	-.055	-.048	.026	.013	1			
10. Tenure	2.300	1.359	-.024	.388***	-.032	-.049	-.065	-.076	.192***	.703***	.703***	1		
11. Firm age	2.868	1.091	-.144	.349***	.023	-.098	-.130*	-.032	-.032	.067	-.040***	.494***	1	
12. Firm size	2.781	1.500	-.042	.357***	.048	-.095	-.132*	-.049	.091	.301***	-.061	.386***	.512***	1

Note. *N* = 310. CSR = corporate social responsibility; SSL = self-sacrificial leadership; POS = perceived organizational support; POJ = perceived organizational justice.

* *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01. *** *p* < .001.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 3 presents the regression analysis results. Hypothesis 1 predicted the relationship between perceived CSR and organizational cynicism, but the legal dimension of CSR was not supported in the base model (Model 1 without

moderation). However, as observed in Models 4, 7, and 10, the hypotheses regarding moderation effects (i.e., Hypotheses 2, 3, and 4) yielded statistically significant results only for the legal dimension of CSR. Therefore, all hypotheses received partial support.

Table 3. Results of Main and Moderating Effects Analysis

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6		Model 7		Model 8		Model 9		Model 10	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Legal CSR	-.067	0.073	.398	0.180*	-.069	0.073	.451	0.209*	.449	0.167**	-.076	0.073	.48	0.203*	.569	0.185**	-.083	0.073	.513	0.243*
Ethical CSR	-.246	0.084**	-.239	0.083**	-.072	0.184	-.333	0.207	-.239	0.083**	.016	0.175	-.300	0.203	-.227	0.083**	.212	0.189	-.149	0.234
SSL	-.107	0.070	.606	0.262*	.114	0.219	.565	0.275*	-.099	0.069	-.093	0.071	-.102	0.070	-.093	0.069	-.111	0.070	-.095	0.069
POS	.149	0.080†	.133	0.079†	.153	0.080†	.129	0.079	.941	0.244***	.442	0.189*	.927	0.248***	.107	0.079	.135	0.079†	.108	0.079
POJ	-.033	0.089	-.029	0.088	-.038	0.089	-.026	0.089	-.058	0.088	-.031	0.089	-.060	0.088	.918	0.270***	.538	0.230*	.938	0.276***
Gender	.239	0.087**	.227	0.086**	.235	0.087**	.228	0.087**	.225	0.086**	.229	0.087**	.227	0.086**	.221	0.086**	.227	0.087**	.220	0.086*
Age	.015	0.009†	.016	0.009†	.015	0.009†	.016	0.009†	.015	0.009†	.016	0.009†	.015	0.009†	.016	0.009†	.016	0.009†	.016	0.009†
Education	-.100	0.075	-.097	0.074	-.095	0.075	-.100	0.075	-.094	0.074	-.088	0.075	-.097	0.074	-.103	0.074	-.090	0.075	-.101	0.074
Tenure	.063	0.044	.074	0.043†	.067	0.044	.074	0.043†	.072	0.043†	.072	0.044†	.070	0.043	.081	0.043†	.079	0.044†	.082	0.043†
Firm age	-.094	0.046*	-.104	0.046*	-.096	0.046*	-.103	0.046*	-.108	0.046*	-.100	0.046*	-.108	0.046*	-.110	0.045*	-.099	0.046*	-.109	0.046*
Firm size	.026	0.032	.031	0.031	.027	0.032	.031	0.031	.037	0.031	.030	0.032	.037	0.031	.038	0.031	.034	0.032	.038	0.031
Constant	3.985	0.346***	1.983	0.788*	3.349	0.689***	2.108	0.827*	1.771	0.730*	3.106	0.621***	1.824	0.749*	1.276	0.802	2.365	0.692***	1.221	0.818
Moderating effect																				
× Legal CSR			-.163	.058**			-.181	.068**	-.183	.053***			-.195	.066**	-.218	.059***			-.200	.078**
× Ethical CSR					-.059	.055	.032	.065			-.086	.050†	.020	.061			-.149	.055	-.026	.073
		$F(11, 298) =$		$F(12, 297) =$		$F(12, 297) =$		$F(13, 296) =$		$F(12, 297) =$		$F(12, 297) =$		$F(13, 296) =$		$F(12, 297) =$		$F(12, 297) =$		$F(13, 296) =$
		5.16***		5.51***		4.83***		5.09***		5.88***		5.01***		5.42***		6.1***		5.44***		5.62***
Adj. R^2		.129		.149		.130		.147		.159		.135		.157		.165		.147		.163

Note. $N = 310$. CSR = corporate social responsibility; SSL = self-sacrificial leadership; POS = perceived organizational support; POJ = perceived organizational justice.

† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Figure 1 illustrates the moderating effects of legal CSR in Models 4, 7, and 10. Overall, our findings generally supported our arguments.

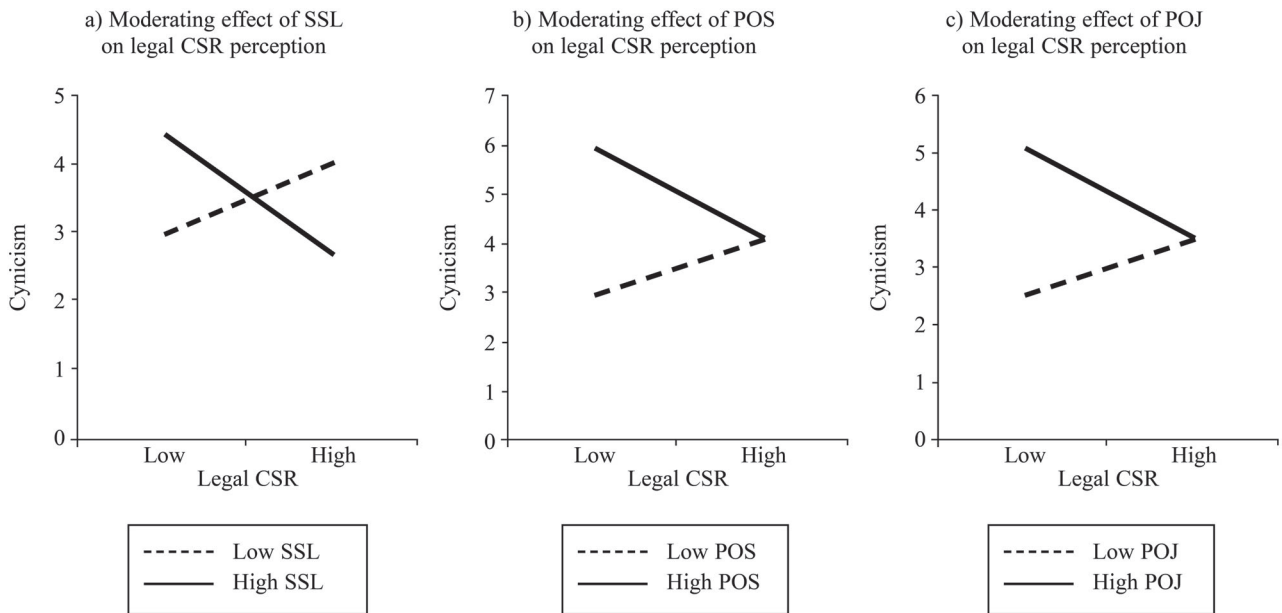


Figure 1. *Effects of the Moderators on the Relationship Between Legal Corporate Social Responsibility and Cynicism*

Note. CSR = corporate social responsibility; SSL = self-sacrificial leadership; POS = perceived organizational support; POJ = perceived organizational justice.

Discussion

Theoretical Contributions

This study used social identity theory to examine the impact of perceived CSR on employees' cynicism. Although social identity theory is the main explanatory logic for perceptions of CSR (Gond et al., 2017), the theory has rarely been applied in empirical studies (Gond et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2020). As a result, there is little understanding in the current literature of the major variables that can be viewed as moderators according to social identity theory. By incorporating the interactions of independent variables that are generally associated with favorable attitudes and behavior (self-sacrificial leadership, perceived organizational support, and justice perception) as moderators within the context of social identity theory, our model extends those used in previous studies, capturing the reactions of individuals who recognized contradictory situations. When these variables were inconsistent with CSR perception, individuals experienced cognitive dissonance, psychological tension, and increased cynicism. This finding enriches the literature on social identity theory and secures a theoretical foundation for research related to CSR.

There is also a growing need for research on cynicism, which is not only widespread but also increasing in modern organizations (Bommer et al., 2005). Our interpretation of cynicism on the basis of social identity theory expands the scope of the literature in this field, highlighting the centrality of the relationship between employees and their companies. Emphasizing the importance of CSR, this study underscores its potential counterproductive effects, negating positive influences on employees.

Practical Implications

Our study imparts crucial managerial insights emphasizing the significance of consistency among organizational practices and employees perceptions. This aligns with the system strength concept proposed in strategic human resource



management studies, which argues that effective communication with organizational members amplifies the overall impact of human resource management practices (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). While strengthening individual factors contributing to positive psychological states is crucial, managers should ensure that their leadership style aligns cohesively with company systems and policies.

Although our results show that ethical CSR was more effective in reducing cynicism than was legal CSR, the moderating effect appeared only in the legal dimension in this study. This may be because in our data, on average, awareness of legal CSR was higher than that of ethical CSR (see Table 2), making the cognitive conflict more evident. In addition, because most legal CSR is mandatory, a low level of legal CSR may raise doubts about the legitimacy of the organization or lead to a psychological contract breach. In that situation, a leader's sacrificial behavior, organizational support, or fair treatment can result in stimulating cynicism. Although our data did not show a moderating effect in the case of ethical CSR, it is possible that one could be found in a society in which companies are perceived as having a high level of ethical CSR overall.

Researchers have also found that younger individuals tend to exhibit higher cynicism levels (Wisse et al., 2018). Our findings align with this trend, showing a negative association between age and cynicism. In terms of identification, younger generations' exposure to a diverse information landscape may lead to them encountering conflicting information, presenting challenges in fostering organizational identification. Thus, organizations valuing young human capital must proactively address cynicism, acknowledging the impact of generational differences and preparing to mitigate its effects.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study has several limitations. Similar to previous research on CSR that were based on social identity theory (Gond et al., 2017), this study did not include direct measurement of organizational identification, which is needed to improve understanding in this field. Second, our unexpected and counterintuitive results showing a positive association between perceived organizational support and cynicism may be due to the inclusion of self-sacrificial leadership and perceived organizational justice as variables. Exploring the complex interactions between management support, organizational justice, and perceived organizational support could be an attractive avenue for future research. Regarding demographic characteristics, our study unintentionally included relatively young participants, most of whom were women, with short job tenures, all of which are demographic factors known to have significant relationships with our key variables. Although we controlled for these factors, the possibility of hidden effects remains. Future studies could recruit more diverse samples to ensure greater generalizability. In addition, the degree of consistency of each CSR dimension varied, which may potentially have given rise to alternative moderating effects in different settings. While additional analysis did not reveal any moderating effects in this study, it is essential to acknowledge the possibility. Last, it is essential to take into account the social and cultural context in which this study took place. China's current national characteristics would have affected the respondents' social considerations of adopting CSR policies. Thus, further research is needed to explore the interactions between each dimension in other cultures and societies.

Acknowledgments

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

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