

# **Corporate Social Responsibility and Employer Attractiveness**

Three Essays on its Role in International Recruitment for  
Multinational Enterprises

Doctoral Thesis

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## Abstract

Recruitment is a key strategic domain in today's global war for talent, prompting both academics and practitioners to undertake an endless quest for knowledge about the factors that influence applicant attraction to organizations and their employment-related intentions and behaviors. It is well known that job and organizational characteristics, like pay, work climate, and career opportunities, influence recruitment outcomes. Nevertheless, these characteristics have become less useful as ways for firms to distinguish themselves due to the interchangeability of jobs and company profiles within the same industry. In the light of this view, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has emerged as a reputational asset that helps firms distinguish themselves from their rivals and gain an advantage in the talent war. The link between CSR and recruitment is currently particularly relevant due to numerous corporate scandals and heightened public awareness of socio-environmental issues and business ethics. While CSR is at the forefront of the global corporate agenda in today's socially-conscious market environment, the extant literature lacks an international perspective. Most research has been conducted in the domestic context and in developed countries, creating a gap regarding how multinational enterprises (MNEs) from different countries of origin can leverage CSR and develop optimal international recruiting strategies, not only in developed but also in emerging countries. This thesis therefore contributes to addressing this gap through three studies.

Study 1 employs a web-based experiment using realistic interactive recruitment webpages and involving 490 potential applicants from Germany, Switzerland and Austria. This approach advances previous studies in which researchers used printouts of websites and provided information on firms' CSR activities directly. However, only real, interactive websites allow respondents' behaviors to be tracked and applicants' willingness to search for information about a firm's CSR, which is a determinant of their awareness of the firm's CSR activities, to be explored. The study reveals that emerging market MNEs (EMNEs) suffer from a double disadvantage: it is difficult for companies which are not only based in a foreign country but in an emerging market to hire local talent in developed host countries. As a result, fewer applicants pursue jobs in EMNEs than developed market MNEs (DMNEs). Nevertheless, good CSR helps mitigate this negative effect. We also find, however, evidence that applicants have a low level of willingness to search for information on CSR, which presents a serious challenge to firms' attempts to maximize the benefits of CSR engagement.

Study 1 shows that CSR is relevant to applicants in developed countries, but that is not surprising. There are two more important and practically relevant questions: what the relative importance of CSR to applicants is compared to other instrumental factors (e.g., salary, career opportunities, work climate, etc.), and whether applicants from emerging markets care about CSR. Therefore, Study 2 applies a cross-national choice-based conjoint analysis technique which uses a decompositional approach to calibrate the relative importance of an MNE's country of origin (developed vs. emerging) and three CSR dimensions (economic, social and environmental responsibilities – the three defining pillars of the triple bottom line concept) as compared to more traditional instrumental attributes in job choice decisions of young applicants in an emerging country (Vietnam) and a developed country (the US). The results confirm the importance of an MNE's country of origin and CSR to a sample of 1,023 Vietnamese and US

undergraduate students. Specifically, EMNEs are confronted with a significant human resources challenge when attracting talent, not only in developed markets but also in emerging countries. Unlike Study 1, which focuses on CSR's overall effects, Study 2 goes further and examines the three different dimensions of CSR. Each of the three CSR dimensions has specific importance. Furthermore, the national context moderates the importance of CSR: applicants from emerging markets attach more value to the economic dimension of CSR, but less value to the social and environmental dimensions of CSR. Despite these differences, the overall influential structure of job choice remains largely similar across countries, opening up opportunities for global employer branding strategies.

Although it is apparent from Studies 1 and 2 that CSR exerts a positive effect on recruitment outcomes, there is still considerable ambiguity about the mechanism through which different CSR dimensions influence applicants. Study 3 examines the underlying mechanisms through which different CSR dimensions influence applicants' job-pursuit intentions, and more pertinently, proposes the optimal CSR configurations for attracting job applicants according to the origins of MNEs. Two experiments were conducted using realistic social media job posts and a sample of graduates from India and Vietnam. Experiment 1 (n = 350) draws causal inferences and tests the underlying mechanisms for each CSR dimension via two fundamental dimensions of social perception—warmth and competence—by using regression-based conditional process analysis. Embracing the inherently complex and multilevel nature of international recruitment, Experiment 2 (n = 621) adds information on MNEs' countries of origin and examines the inter-relationships between multiple CSR signals and perceptions of firms' countries of origin using the fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) technique. fsQCA complements regression-based conditional process analysis by providing more nuanced coverage of all the possible combinations of all the three CSR dimensions and country-of-origin perception in a more configural manner than the conventional “net effect” symmetrical explanation, thereby uncovering multiple configurations of causal pathways that can lead to high job-pursuit intention. The results show that applicants combine meso-level (the firm's CSR) and macro-level (the firm's country of origin) factors in a configural manner, such that no factors at any single level of analysis are sufficient, in isolation, to shape micro-level applicants' outcomes in international recruitment.

Finally, the conclusion of this thesis highlights the limitations of the studies and opportunities for future research by drawing on insights from the three studies and building a synthesis from their results.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

BSR	Business for Social Responsibility
CED	Committee for Economic Development
CPSC	Consumer Product Safety Commission
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
CSV	Creating shared value
DMNE	Developed market multinational enterprise
EC	European Commission
EEOC	Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
EMNE	Emerging market multinational enterprise
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross domestic product
GRI	Global Reporting Initiative
HCN	Host country national
HRM	Human resource management
IHRM	International human resource management
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
MNE	Multinational enterprise
PCN	Parent country national
SCSR	Strategic Corporate Social Responsibility
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
S&P	Standard and Poor's
TCN	Third country national
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNGC	United Nations Global Compact
USA	United States of America

## 1. Introduction

Recruitment, defined as “the organization’s collective efforts to identify, attract, and influence the job choices of competent applicants” (Ployhart, 2006: 869), is one of the most crucial components of human resource management (HRM) because it impacts applicant pool characteristics and hence defines the set of individuals who will be influenced by all subsequent human resource (HR) functions (Taylor & Collins, 2000; Turban & Cable, 2003). Good recruitment enables firms to attract more qualified applicants, leading to greater utility in their selection systems and consequently contributing to their sustained competitive advantage (Rynes, 1991). This is also reflected in a study by Hall (1993: 135): “Employee know-how and reputation are perceived as the resources which make the most important contribution to business success.” Indeed, as of 2020, ninety percent of the value of the typical S&P 500 companies is represented by intangible assets such as talent and intellectual property (Ali, 2020). Furthermore, many studies have found convincing evidence of a link between investment in employees and stock performance: in particular, the Fortune 100’s “best companies to work for” outperform the market (Bowman, 2017; Fulmer, Gerhart, & Scott, 2003; Goenner, 2008). Nevertheless, attracting qualified employees has rarely been more challenging due to ever-intensifying competition for scarce talent, which is widely known as the “war for talent.” According to an annual Talent Shortage Survey by ManpowerGroup (2022), three in four (75%) companies worldwide have reported talent shortages – a sixteen-year high. Furthermore, KornFerry (2020) has estimated that the global talent shortage could reach 85.2 million people by 2030, resulting in the loss of \$8.5 trillion in unrealized annual revenue, equivalent to the combined GDP of Germany and Japan. Unsurprisingly, firms have realized the importance of talent recruitment to organizational success in a tight labor market with an acute skill shortage, and have increased their investment in recruitment efforts (ManpowerGroup, 2019; Sullivan, 2020). Recruitment startups, moreover, raised \$1.6 billion in 2019, up from \$1.1 billion in 2018, and there is no sign of this trend slowing down (Biswas, 2019). The cumulative amount of funding provided to recruitment startups reached \$10.9 billion at the end of August 2022 (Crunchbase, 2022).

Similarly, scholars have devoted extensive efforts to understanding recruitment. An evaluation of the evolution of the literature on recruitment reveals five key trends.

Firstly, the vast majority of the early work adopted a US-centric perspective, often focusing on recruitment by domestic companies (Allen & Vardaman, 2017; Collings, Scullion, & Dowling, 2009). This narrow perspective could be misleading, especially in an increasingly globalized work context. In fact, most employees do not work for US-based firms, and US-based employees of US-based firms only represent a minority of the global workforce. Only 24% of the firms listed in the Fortune Global 500 are based in the US, and many large US firms like Chevron, Coca-Cola, IBM, and Procter & Gamble employ more people outside the US than they do within it (Fortune, 2021). Criticism of this perspective centers on the fact that many American-based findings and theories implicitly assume universality, while a large body of empirical research substantiates the cultural diversity of values and their impact on behavior (Almıaçık, Almıaçık, Erat, & Akçın, 2014; Hofstede, 2001). Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan (2010), in addition, documented that 96% of human psychology and behavior studies are based

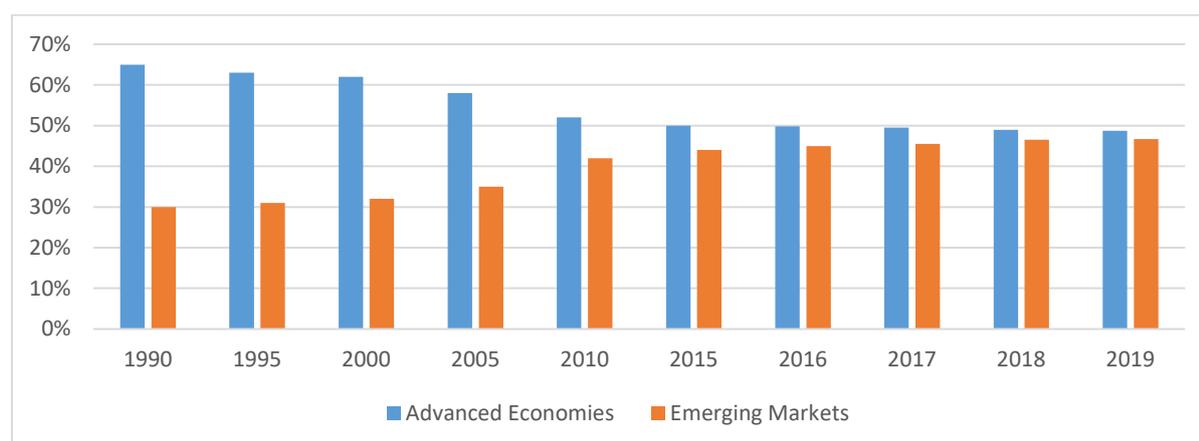
on samples drawn from “Western-educated industrialized rich democratic” (WEIRD) societies, which account for only 12% of the world’s population, and that these WEIRD subjects tend to be outliers who are far from representative.

Secondly, as the mobility of human resources has become ubiquitous due to internationalization and the rapid growth of global competition since the mid-1990s, international recruitment has emerged as a critical aspect of HRM. There has been an increase in literature on international recruitment outside the US, and on comparative recruitment across countries (Arthur Jr, Woehr, Akande, & Strong, 1995; Easterby-Smith, Malina, & Yuan, 1995; Henkens, Remery, & Schippers, 2008; Ma & Trigo, 2012; Peiper & Estrin, 1998; Seeck & Parzefall, 2010; Zabalza & Matey, 2011), which contributes to a better understanding of the importance of context in international recruitment. These studies show that there are significant differences between US, European and Asian firms with regard to recruitment policies and practices, an understanding which constitutes a valuable foundation for future research. Nevertheless, the discussion has focused extensively on the convergence, divergence, and transfer of recruitment practices across countries, with macro-oriented theoretical perspectives related to firm actions. Very few studies have directly addressed the relationship between cross-cultural issues and the issues which have been primarily studied in the recruitment literature, such as organizational attractiveness, job-pursuit intention, job choice, and employer brand image. There is thus a need for more micro-oriented research on individual behaviors in international recruitment (Allen & Vardaman, 2017).

Thirdly, although international human resource management (IHRM) deals with the complexities of operating in different countries and thus entails the management of different national categories of employees—parent country nationals (PCNs), host country nationals (HCNs) and third country nationals (TCNs)—the research agenda on IHRM in general, and MNE staffing in particular, has focused narrowly on PCN expatriates (Cho, 2018; Collings et al., 2009; Cooke, Wood, Wang, & Veen, 2019; Doherty & Dickmann, 2012; Harzing, 2001; Tung, 1981). Traditionally, the role of expatriates in facilitating knowledge diffusion within MNEs has been well recognized (Edstrom & Galbraith, 1977). More recently, however, Gong (2003) has called for a more heterogeneous staffing composition (i.e. a mix of PCNs, HCNs and TCNs) because such a heterogeneous composition facilitates access to and recognition of diverse sources of innovation and organizational learning, leading to improved information interpretation and integrative learning performance compared to a homogenous composition. Collings, Scullion, and Morley (2007), in addition, noticed that the decreasing supply of conventional PCN expatriate managers, in tandem with high costs and ongoing challenges around expatriate performance, have forced MNEs to reconsider their global staffing strategies and move beyond their traditional reliance on PCN expatriates. HCNs and TCNs are as important as PCNs. Greater deployment of HCNs and TCNs in preference to PCNs has been suggested as a possible mechanism for combating management ethnocentrism and achieving cultural synergies (Schuler, Budhwar, & Florowski, 2002). The increase in cross-border distance problems and uncertainty due to mobility restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic have also contributed to the decline in employees’ willingness to work abroad, further increasing the need to engage more HCNs (Caligiuri, De Cieri, Minbaeva, Verbeke, & Zimmermann, 2020).

Fourthly, while the bulk of contributions had been heavily slanted towards international recruitment of MNEs from developed North American and European countries (DMNEs), MNEs from emerging markets (EMNEs) have not received the same level of attention. According to a systematic review of IHRM literature conducted by Cooke et al. (2019), only 6% of the studies included EMNEs (those which were included were mainly from China). There is thus a need for more research devoted to EMNEs, especially at a time of rapid changes in the world economic landscape and the remarkable rise of EMNEs (Allen & Vardaman, 2017; Collings et al., 2009; Meyer & Xin, 2018). The number of EMNEs in the Fortune Global 500 soared more than twofold from 69 in 2007 to 164 in 2017 (Luo & Tung, 2018). These EMNEs are increasingly expanding beyond national borders, not only to other emerging markets but also to more developed markets, in an attempt to acquire the technological, managerial and marketing competencies they lack when competing with well-established DMNEs (Dietz, Orr, & Xing, 2008; Law, Song, Wong, & Chen, 2009; Meyer & Xin, 2018). Since local talent is the main source of such competencies, attracting local employees with the right know-how is of critical importance to EMNEs (Zhang, Zhou, van Gorp, & van Witteloostuijn, 2020). Nevertheless, attracting a qualified workforce has become more challenging than ever in today's "war for talent," and this issue is particularly difficult for EMNEs due to their double disadvantages of liabilities of foreignness plus liabilities of emergingness (Held & Bader, 2018; Held & Berg, 2015). Held and Bader (2018) have documented the existence and the magnitude of the liabilities of emergingness of EMNEs in developed markets: EMNEs are less attractive to applicants in developed markets simply because they are from emerging countries. Surprisingly, so far researchers have closely looked into the internationalization patterns, motives, and strategies of EMNEs, but paid little attention to the "human side" of EMNEs (Meyer & Xin, 2018). Addressing this research gap is crucial for the catch-up strategies of EMNEs.

Last but not least, the extant recruitment literature still lacks an international perspective. Most research has been conducted in a single context and in developed countries (with China and India as exceptions), leaving a gap in our understanding of optimal international recruiting strategies for MNEs (Allen & Vardaman, 2017; Cooke et al., 2019). While the emerging BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China) have recently received more attention in the literature, the Next-Eleven countries, such as Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Mexico, warrant further investigation in future research (Cooke et al., 2019; Held & Bader, 2018). The center of economic gravity is slowly shifting to emerging and developing economies as these economies account for nearly 50% of global GDP and contribute more than 80% of global growth in output and consumption (Lagarde, 2016). Figure 1.1 illustrates the increasing importance of these economies to the world economy. Moreover, with economic activity growing quickly in emerging markets, it is little wonder that many MNEs are pegging their prospects for growth to emerging markets, leading to an increasing need to recruit employees in these markets (Cavusgil, 2021; OECD, 2021; Ready, Hill, & Conger, 2008). Therefore, it is vital to investigate whether potential applicants from emerging markets can be attracted in the same way as those from developed markets, or whether different strategies are more promising. Finding the answer to this question will help MNEs manage the fundamental standardization-adaptation dilemma in employer branding for international markets.

**Figure 1.1. Share of world GDP accounted by emerging markets**

Source: Cavusgil (2021)

Given these gaps in the current literature, this thesis is intended to shed light on how MNEs, and especially EMNEs, can attract prospective local employees (HCNs) globally, in both emerging and developed markets.

Previous research has uncovered important factors influencing the attraction of prospective employees or applicants to certain organizations and their employment-related intentions and behaviors. While early research stream focused exclusively on specific instrumental attributes—the tangible utilitarian benefits of jobs, such as pay, benefits, advancement opportunities, location, or flexibility (Cable & Judge, 1994; Rynes, 1991)—more recent research stream has also examined symbolic attributes. These relate to the symbolic or intangible image of an organization, such as good corporate citizenship, progressive labor practices, an emphasis on diversity, sponsorship of cultural activities, or pro-environmental practices (Aiman-Smith, Bauer, & Cable, 2001; Bauer & AimanSmith, 1996; Cable & Graham, 2000; Held & Bader, 2018; Highhouse, Lievens, & Sinar, 2003; Turban & Cable, 2003). One increasingly important symbolic attribute is corporate social responsibility (CSR). While traditional instrumental attributes, such as pay or career opportunities, have become less useful as ways for firms to distinguish themselves due to the interchangeability of jobs and company profiles within the same industry, CSR has emerged as a reputational asset that helps firms distinguish themselves from their rivals and gain an advantage in the “war for talent” (Evans & Davis, 2011; Gond, El Akremi, Swaen, & Babu, 2017; Greening & Turban, 2000; Highhouse et al., 2003; Jones, Newman, Shao, & Cooke, 2019; Jones, Willness, & Madey, 2014; Kim & Park, 2011). The search for a better understanding of the link between CSR and recruitment is currently particularly relevant given numerous corporate scandals and heightened public consciousness of socio-environmental issues and business ethics (Zhang, Cao, Zhang, Liu, & Li, 2020). Indeed, a scan of the websites, annual reports, and recruiting brochures of big corporations will yield specific corporate statements about their CSR practices. One interesting observation to emerge from a quick check of five Fortune Global 500 websites (Walmart, Apple, CocaCola, ExxonMobil and Sinopec Group) was that all five had statements about their positive social or environmental policies and practices on the homepages of their main websites, whereas none of these organizations’ homepages contained specific messages about the internal

characteristics of the jobs they offer, such as pay structure. It is evident that firms broadcast messages about their CSR to maintain a particular organizational image which will attract talent. Although CSR is at the forefront of the global corporate agenda in today's socially conscious market environment, its role in IHRM is still neglected (Cooke et al., 2019). The impact of CSR on applicant attraction has been documented in the literature, but so far previous studies have mainly been conducted in domestic settings, and particularly in developed countries (Maon, Vanhamme, De Roeck, Lindgreen, & Swaen, 2019), leaving country-level factors an under-researched area. CSR may have different effects according to an MNE's country of origin. Such an international perspective appears to be missing from extant employee-focused micro-CSR research, as exemplified by Jones et al.'s (2019) call for multi-level work. It should be emphasized that while the vast majority of extant individual-focused CSR research is micro in nature, "the scientific study of these phenomena is by no means restricted to the individual level" (Jones et al., 2019: 300). Therefore, the main research question for the first study<sup>1</sup> detailed in this thesis is:

- *Does CSR help weaken the negative relationship between emerging country of origin of an MNE and the job-pursuit intentions of potential applicants in developed markets?*

Before analyzing the impacts of CSR, it is important to take applicants' willingness to search for information about a firm's CSR into account, as this is a determinant of their awareness of the firm's CSR activities. Firms cannot benefit from CSR if applicants are unaware of it (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010). Researchers have found that the general public's awareness of companies' CSR activities is typically low, which represents a serious impediment to firms' attempts to maximize benefits from their engagement with CSR (Bhattacharya, Sen, & Korschun, 2008; Du et al., 2010). Nevertheless, to the best of our knowledge, no prior studies have addressed willingness to search for information on CSR in the international recruitment context. Previous studies have mainly used written vignettes and organizational website printouts as stimulus materials and directly provided information on companies' CSR activities (Behrend, Baker, & Thompson, 2009; Evans & Davis, 2011; Hong & Kim, 2017; Jones et al., 2014). However, reality is not that straightforward. Therefore, in our experimental study, potential applicants had to actively look for CSR information on MNEs' websites, allowing us to explore their motivation to find such information. Thus, an additional question arises:

- *Are potential applicants in developed markets more willing to search for CSR information of MNEs from emerging countries than they are for CSR information of MNEs from developed countries?*

Besides applicants' willingness to search for CSR information, we also take into account their skepticism, which is one of the key challenges of communicating CSR messages (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2007). Although CSR is a means to strengthen legitimacy and to attract local talent, MNEs also run the risk of skepticism amongst stakeholders. This CSR dilemma has been depicted in studies by Bachmann and Ingenhoff (2016) and Du et al. (2010). On the one hand, stakeholders demand to know more about the positive actions of companies, but on the other they tend to become suspicious of the sincerity of companies' motives when they

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<sup>1</sup> Study 1 was accepted for publication in Management International Review (MIR) on October 27, 2022.

extensively promote their CSR efforts. Furthermore, according to social psychologists, people have a tendency to care more about why others do things than about what they do (Donia, Ronen, Sirsly, & Bonaccio, 2019; Joo, Moon, & Choi, 2016). It is possible for CSR to backfire if there is too much skepticism (Forehand & Grier, 2003; Yoon, Gurhan-Canli, & Schwarz, 2006). This leads to another question:

- *Is the moderating effect of CSR on the negative relationship between emerging country of origin and job-pursuit intentions moderated by sincere motive attribution of MNEs' CSR?*

These three research questions are addressed in Study 1, which employs a web-based experiment using realistic recruitment webpages and involving 490 potential applicants from Germany, Switzerland and Austria. The study confirmed the expected liability of emergingness, in that EMNEs are at a disadvantage in attracting local talent in developed markets due to their origin in emerging markets. Potential applicants in developed host countries have less intention of applying to EMNEs than they do to DMNEs. However, CSR helps EMNEs mitigate this negative effect of originating from emerging countries on hiring talent in developed host countries.

Although CSR has received little attention to date in the IHRM literature (Cooke et al., 2019), Study 1 provides evidence that CSR is an important factor influencing MNEs' recruitment in developed host countries, particularly when the company's country image is poor. Yet, two intriguing questions arise: (1) CSR is relevant to applicants in developed countries, but that is unsurprising, or even almost trivial. The more important and practically relevant question is: what is the relative importance of CSR compared to other instrumental factors, like salary? (2) Do applicants from emerging markets care about CSR? These questions uncover three major gaps in the field. Firstly, little is known about the relative importance of symbolic attributes like CSR compared to instrumental attributes like salary. This is because the vast majority of prior studies have applied a compositional approach, judging attributes separately, and consequently studied an artificial situation and failed to consider the interdependency of attributes when evaluated together (Baum & Kabst, 2013; Montgomery & Ramus, 2011; Ronda, Abril, & Valor, 2021). In reality, nevertheless, applicants compare job offers<sup>2</sup> with one another holistically, and real job offers hardly ever offer the best of everything. Thus, there is a need for a more rigorous examination of the degree to which applicants value the symbolic components of job offers relative to instrumental components, in order to adequately capture the actual trade-off decisions facing applicants in their job choice. Secondly, while CSR is fundamentally a multi-dimensional construct, extant literature primarily focuses on CSR's overall effects and is virtually silent about whether its different facets have different influences on applicants through heterogeneous underlying mechanisms (Gond et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2019; Zhao, Wu, Chen, & Zhou, 2022). Thirdly, extant literature lacks an international perspective, as much of the research has been conducted in developed countries (Allen & Vardaman, 2017; Cooke et al., 2019; Dögl & Holtbrügge, 2014; Jones et al., 2019). Therefore, it remains unclear whether the findings drawn from samples in developed countries

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<sup>2</sup> The two terms "job" and "organization" are interrelated because selection of a given job necessitates selection of a given organization.

hold in emerging markets or whether cross-national differences exist. CSR has been found to be an important factor for applicants in developed markets where post-materialistic values are highly relevant (Aiman-Smith et al., 2001; Belinda, Westerman, & Bergman, 2018; Berens, Riel, & van Rekom, 2007; Bridoux, Stofberg, & Den Hartog, 2016; Burbano, 2016; Evans & Davis, 2011; Jones et al., 2014; Kim & Park, 2011; Montgomery & Ramus, 2011). Applicants in emerging markets, on the other hand, are embedded in different institutional and cultural environments and may prioritize different factors. Moreover, while recruitment research shows that EMNEs suffer from the double disadvantage of the liability of foreignness and the liability of emergingness when recruiting talent in developed markets (Held & Bader, 2018; Holtbrügge & Kreppel, 2015), the existence and the magnitude of the liabilities of emergingness in emerging markets have still been overlooked in the literature. Investigating whether job preference is culture-free or culture-bound is important to help MNEs manage the tension between global integration and local responsiveness, one of the key challenges they face (Rosenzweig, 2006). These identified gaps led to the formulation of the following main research questions for Study 2<sup>3</sup>:

- *What is the relative importance of an MNE's country of origin (developed vs. emerging) and different CSR dimensions, as compared to more traditional instrumental attributes, in the job choice decisions of young applicants?*
- *To what extent does the relative importance of an MNE's country of origin and different CSR dimensions in job choice vary across emerging and developed countries? In other words, do EMNEs suffer from liabilities of emergingness in emerging countries as they do in developed countries, and do applicants in emerging markets care about CSR?*

By applying cross-national choice-based conjoint analysis with its decompositional approach in which the attribute values are decomposed from the overall evaluation of different attributes in combination (Rao, 2014), Study 2 calibrates the relative importance of an MNE's country of origin and different CSR dimensions against other salient instrumental attributes (salary, career opportunities, work climate, and task attractiveness) in job choice decisions of applicants from a developed country (the US) and an emerging country (Vietnam). The results of the choice-based conjoint analysis confirm the importance of an MNE's country of origin in job choice. EMNEs are confronted with a significant HR challenge when attracting talent not only in developed markets but also in emerging markets. Unlike Study 1, which focuses on CSR's overall effects, Study 2 goes further and examines the economic, social and environmental dimensions of CSR—the three defining pillars of the triple bottom line concept (Choi & Ng, 2011; Elkington, 1998). Study 2 shows that each of these three CSR dimensions has a certain importance. The results indicate that national context moderates the importance of CSR: applicants from emerging markets attach more value to the economic dimension of CSR, but less value to the social and environmental dimensions.

Besides finding answers to the stated research questions, Study 2 also reveals new research gaps. Firstly, as mentioned earlier, previous work has primarily focused on CSR's overall effects (Gond et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2019; Zhao et al., 2022). However, a remarkable result which emerged from Study 2 is that each CSR dimension exerts a distinct influence on

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<sup>3</sup> Study 2 is in the second round of review for an international academic journal.

job choice, as their importance weights are not significantly correlated. This raises an intriguing possibility: that the three CSR dimensions influence job choice through heterogeneous underlying mechanisms. Therefore, integrating different CSR dimensions into one overall scale or relying upon any one dimension as a surrogate for the others may be flawed. Future studies should adopt a more fine-grained conceptualization of CSR to assess the heterogeneous effects of different CSR dimensions more comprehensively (Zhao et al., 2022). Secondly, while the positive effect of CSR on recruitment outcomes is well-documented, there is still considerable ambiguity with regard to the underlying mechanism explaining why different CSR dimensions influence applicants, especially those from emerging markets (Cooke et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2019; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). For instance, Studies 1 and 2 employ signaling (Spence, 1973) and social identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) mechanisms to frame and justify the hypotheses without directly testing actual mediators. There is much potential for further advancing the field by directly testing mechanisms implied by theories. Thirdly, although Studies 1 and 2 highlight the importance of country of origin (developed vs. emerging), it remains unclear which particular higher-order dimensions constitute the fundamental country-of-origin image in the recruiting context and how these higher-order dimensions interact with CSR and moderate the relationship between CSR and recruitment outcomes. Finally, prior studies (e.g., Evans & Davis, 2011; Hong & Kim, 2017; Jones, Willness, & Heller, 2016; Jones et al., 2014) have mainly adopted the net-effect approach (Ragin, 2006), focusing on the separate impacts of competing independent antecedents/signals with no attempt to define possible combinations of signals in configuration, as exemplified in the remark by Connelly, Certo, Ireland, and Reutzel (2011: 60) that “an important consideration that has received limited scholarly attention is how receivers meaningfully aggregate signals.” Specifically, the net-effect approach assumes that applicants combine information on various components of CSR in a simple additive manner, implying that “more is better” (i.e.,  $2+2=4$ ). However, it is suspected that this additive model is oversimplified and does not necessarily capture the actual cognitive process, which may be configurational and characterized by equifinality, implying the existence of multiple configurations of causal conditions leading to a favorable recruitment outcome (Hoffman, 1960). Therefore, it is worthwhile for researchers to take a more holistic, configural approach which combines signals from various CSR components and firms’ origins to assess the inherently complex and multilevel causation in international recruiting. These identified gaps led to the formulation of the following main research questions for Study 3<sup>4</sup>:

- *What are the mechanisms that explain the underlying processes by which different dimensions of CSR affect applicants’ job-pursuit intentions?*
- *Does the strength of these mechanisms depend on firms’ country of origin, and if so, by which particular higher-order dimensions of country-of-origin image?*
- *How do applicants aggregate signals about different dimensions of CSR and MNEs’ country of origin? What are the optimal CSR configurations (i.e., different combinations of CSR dimensions) for MNEs according to their origins?*

By conducting two experiments with realistic social media posts advertising jobs and a sample of graduates from India and Vietnam, using regression-based conditional process

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<sup>4</sup> Study 3 is under review in an international academic journal.

analysis and fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA), Study 3 shows that the three CSR dimensions (economic, legal, and ethical) influence job-pursuit intention through different mediation patterns through organizational warmth and competence (the two universal dimensions of social perception), and that applicants combine meso-level (the firm's CSR) and macro-level (the firm's country of origin) factors in a configurational manner, such that no factors at any single level of analysis are sufficient in isolation to shape micro-level applicants' outcomes in international recruitment.

The thesis is organized as follows. The second chapter follows this introductory chapter and gives a detailed overview of the history of CSR and the relationship between CSR and applicant attraction. Chapters three through five include the three studies conducted within the scope of this thesis. The sixth and final chapter concludes the thesis by discussing its main findings, contributions, limitations, and implications for further research.

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## **2. Theoretical Background**

Before delving into the relationship between CSR and applicant attraction, it is important to first understand CSR.

### **2.1. CSR**

To better understand CSR, it is useful to delve into the historical perspective on how CSR has grown, manifested itself, and flourished. Issues of CSR are of course not new and have a long history, dating back to the earliest days of the Industrial Revolution (Crowther & Seifi, 2021: 6-7). For example, Owen (1816) demonstrated that the self-centered approach, with the assumptions that only the internal effects of organizational activities should be considered and that the external environment is a free resource to be exploited, provoked dissatisfaction in the UK, the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution. Indeed, one can trace evidence of CSR concerns back by several centuries, but CSR as a concept only started to take shape in the 1950s, with Bowen being one of the first to define what CSR means in his landmark book “Social Responsibilities of the Businessman” and marking the beginning of the modern era of CSR (Crane, McWilliams, Matten, Moon, & Siegel, 2008: 24-25). While the period prior to the 1950s is mainly seen as a “philanthropic” era in which the focus was merely on charity donation, Bowen (1953) was ahead of his time by articulating a definition of CSR that went beyond philanthropy. According to him, 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” (Bowen, 1953: 6). The contribution of Bowen was so important that he is considered the “Father of CSR” (Carroll, 2006: 6). Specifically, according to Frederick (2006), there were three core ideas about CSR standing out in the 1950s: the idea of the manager as public trustee, the idea of balancing competing claims to corporate resources, and the acceptance of corporate philanthropy as business support of good causes. The 1950s were characterized more by “talk” than “action” and scant discussion of linking CSR with business benefits (Carroll, 2006; Carroll & Shabana, 2010; Crane et al., 2008: 26). This led to the warning of Levitt (1958) about the dangers of CSR.

Despite Levitt's warnings, CSR continued to grow in popularity, and a proliferation of CSR concepts and practices emerged during the 1960s (Carroll, 2006; Carroll & Shabana, 2010; Crane et al., 2008: 27). This was driven largely by the social movements that defined the times, particularly civil rights, women's rights, consumers' rights and the environmental movement in the US (Carroll & Shabana, 2010). These movements reconstructed the overall social environment, resulting in a notably different context, in which businesses would then have to operate. Accordingly, CSR practices towards the end of the 1960s included stockholder relations, philanthropy, employee improvements (e.g., working conditions, personnel policies), and customer relations. However, there were still more “talk” than “action.” CSR literature was also significantly expanded during the 1960s by forward-thinking academics who endeavored to articulate what CSR really meant and what its implications were for business. Davis (1960: 70), one of the most prominent academics in this period, defined CSR as “businessmen’s decisions and actions taken for reasons at least partially beyond the firm’s direct economic or technical interest.” Davis’s work was on the cutting edge with the insight that CSR should be considered in a managerial context, by which he means that CSR can be justified by a complex

and complicated reasoning process as bringing long-term economic gains to the firms which practice it (Davis, 1960: 70). At the same time, Frederick (1960: 60) asserted that business resources should also be used for broad social goals. Similarly, McGuire (1963) argued that companies have certain responsibilities to society beyond their economic and legal obligations.

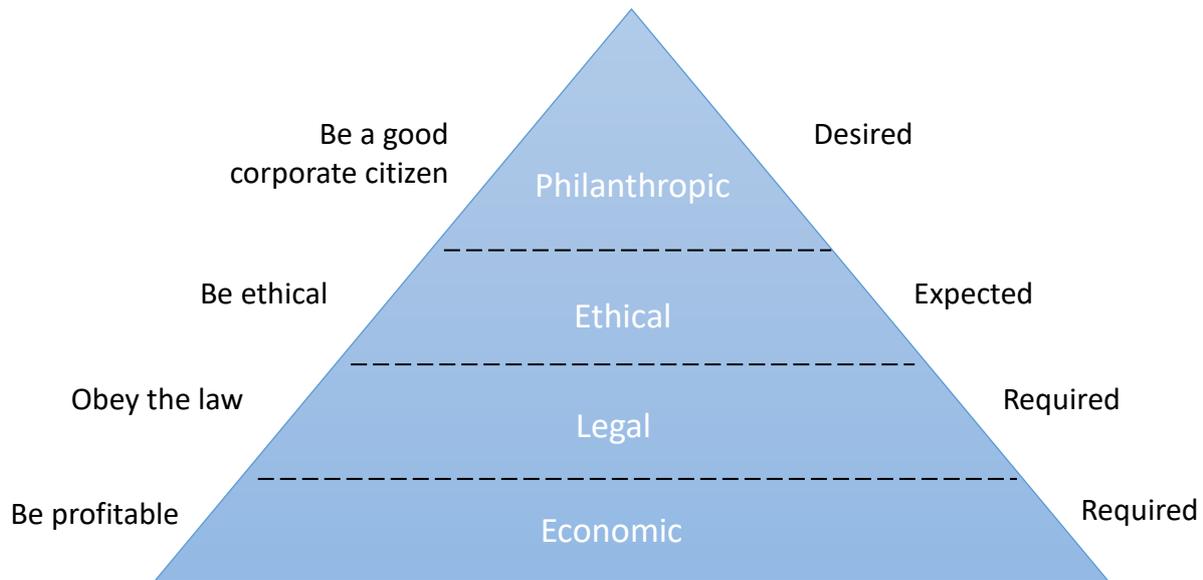
In the 1970s, formal conceptualization of CSR began to accelerate. A ground-breaking contribution to the CSR concept was brought forward by the Committee for Economic Development (CED) in its 1971 publication. The CED opined that “business functions by public consent and its basic purpose is to serve constructively the needs of society to the satisfaction of society” (CED, 1971: 11). It should be noted that the CED’s view was particularly influential because the CED was composed of the chief executive officers and key executives of leading US companies, and thus provided critical practitioner view on the evolving social contract between business and society. This decade also witnessed the formation of some of today’s most renowned socially responsible firms (e.g., the Body Shop in the UK in 1976, Ben & Jerry’s in the US in 1978). Moreover, as the 1960s transitioned into the 1970s and beyond, corporate social responsibility, responsiveness and performance became the center of various discussions (Carroll & Shabana, 2010). Frederick’s 1978 paper drew a clear distinction between corporate social responsibility (CSR<sub>1</sub>: firms “assuming” a socially responsible posture) and corporate social responsiveness (CSR<sub>2</sub>: “the literal act of responding, or of achieving a generally responsive posture, to society”) (Frederick, 1994: 152-154). The concept of corporate social performance entered the literature through the classic article “Dimensions of Corporate Social Performance” by Sethi (1975). According to Sethi (1975: 62), what he calls “performance” is not distinct from responsibility and responsiveness, but rather is intended as a collective term, such that CSR implies “bringing corporate behavior up to a level where it is congruent with the prevailing social norms, values, and expectations of performance.” In addition, Carroll (1979: 500) proposed a four-part definition of CSR which encompasses “the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time.” These responsibilities were embedded in a conceptual model corporate social performance and later depicted as the “pyramid of CSR” with the economic responsibility laying the foundation of the pyramid (Carroll, 1991). The economic component is not only what a firm does for itself, but also what it does for society as well, thus justifying its inclusion in Carroll’s definition. Drawing from Adam Smith’s argument that economics and ethics are not antithetical to one another though some practitioners interpret them that way, Carroll (2021) has always maintained that the economic dimension is laced with the ethical dimension as integral parts of a business. Taking these developments together, it can be seen that the 1970s was the decade in which the managerial approach of CSR, first suggested by Davis (1960), became commonly accepted. Thereafter, it was recommended that firms plan and organize for CSR, gauge CSR performance, and institutionalize corporate social policy. Although there was still more “talk” than “action,” the first involvement of business people, first-mover strategies, legislative initiatives (e.g., the creation of the US Environmental Protection Agency [EPA], the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission [EEOC], and the Consumer Product Safety Commission [CPSC]), and an emerging emphasis on corporate social performance during the 1970s all marked an important advancement towards the idea of the “business case,” a term which refers to “the arguments or rationales supporting or documenting why the business

community should accept and advance the CSR ‘cause’,” or, to put it simply, whether it pays to “do good” (Carroll & Shabana, 2010: 85). In general, Murphy (1978) characterized the period 1953-67 as the “awareness” era of changing social consciousness and recognition of overall responsibility of business, the period 1968-73 as the “issue” era of businesses focusing on specific issues (e.g., racial discrimination, or pollution), and the period 1974-80 and beyond as the “responsiveness” era of serious organizational and managerial actions to promote CSR.

The 1980s produced fewer new definitions, more empirical research, and the rise of alternative themes, including stakeholder management and business ethics as well as further development and refinement of the concept of corporate social performance which entered into the picture in the 1970s (Carroll & Shabana, 2010; Crane et al., 2008: 34). In an attempt to revise and refine the CSR concept, Jones (1980) brought forward a new understanding of CSR as a decision-making process that constitutes corporate behavior. Besides the refinement of the CSR concept, corporate social performance also continued to draw interest. Specifically, the corporate social performance model of Carroll (1979) was further elaborated by Wartick and Cochran (1985), who extended the framework to consist of principles, processes, and policies. Two major alternative themes to CSR that developed during the 1980s were stakeholder theory and business ethics. Stakeholder theory articulated by Freeman (1984) in his classic book “Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach” is a major conceptual contribution to CSR. Although Freeman’s book was intended to focus on strategic management, it substantially influenced the field of CSR. Stakeholder concepts remarkably changed the way in which CSR concerns were thought about and characterized in the business-and-society field, and are virtually inseparable from today’s discussions of CSR (Laplume, Sonpar, & Litz, 2008). The other theme which emerged in the 1980s was business ethics. Frederick (2006) termed the 1980s as the beginning of the “business ethics era,” with a new focus on fostering ethical corporate cultures in a period of widely-reported business scandals (e.g., the Union Carbide explosion at Bhopal in India, the Chernobyl nuclear accident, corporate support of apartheid in South Africa, Ivan Boesky’s insider trading, and many others). At the end of the decade, there was a growing sense of awareness of CSR in the international community, which was demonstrated by the creation of the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1983, the adoption of the Montreal Protocol by the United Nations (UN) in 1987, the publication of the report “Our Common Future” by the Brundtland Commission in 1987, and the creation of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 1988 (Latapí Agudelo, Jóhannsdóttir, & Davídsdóttir, 2019).

The 1990s saw very few unique contributions to the CSR concept. The first notable contribution was the refinement of Carroll’s (1979) corporate social performance model by Wood (1991). Wood emphasized that corporate social performance needed to incorporate social impacts, policies, and programs as the collective outputs of a company’s CSR initiatives. Therefore, Wood’s model is broader and more comprehensive than that presented earlier by Carroll (1979), thus advancing the corporate social performance construct to where it is today. The second notable contribution was the “CSR Pyramid” presented by Carroll (1991), which was not used to give CSR a new meaning, but rather to provide a useful approach to CSR for businesses seeking to balance their commitments to their shareholders with their responsibilities to a wider set of stakeholders (see Figure 2.1). Another important contribution came from the

“Triple Bottom Line” concept, first conceived by Elkington in 1994 (Elkington, 1998). This concept widened the conventional reporting structure to include ecological and social performance, in addition to economic performance. Despite these few unique contributions, CSR continued to serve as a basis for complementary themes and concepts (Crane et al., 2008: 37). For example, corporate citizenship and sustainability, as important complementary themes, drew attention in the 1990s. These notions embraced CSR thinking and were compatible with the CSR concept in terms of their meaning and applications (Carroll, 2015). During the 1990s, the debate of CSR was also brought forward by public figures. President Clinton’s launch of the Ron Brown Corporate Citizenship Award to reward good corporations is a case in point. In this period, the quest for CSR accelerated in terms of its global outreach (Carroll & Shabana, 2010). Accordingly, Frederick (2006) termed the 1990s and 2000s the “era of global corporate citizenship.” This was because the globalization process in the 1990s intensified MNEs’ operations in diverse business environments with conflicting pressures and expectations from the home and the host countries (Carroll, 2015). Adoption of international agreements on sustainable development also increased during this period with the creation of the European Environmental Agency in 1990, the UN summit on the Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro, which translated into the adoption of Agenda 21 and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1992, and the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 (Latapí Agudelo et al., 2019). The most significant advances in CSR in this period were in the realm of business, with the foundation of the non-profit association Business for Social Responsibility (BSR) which helps member companies to leverage CSR as a competitive advantage (Crane et al., 2008: 38). In addition to the growth of global outreach, research linking CSR with corporate financial performance also exploded during this decade, preparing the ground for the search for a business case for CSR (Carroll & Shabana, 2010). For example, Burke and Logsdon (1996) determined five strategic approaches to CSR—namely centrality, specificity, voluntarism, and visibility—which could help firms to achieve both business objectives and value creation. Nevertheless, despite the growing number of studies on the relationship between CSR and financial performance, Griffin and Mahon (1997) closed out the decade by raising concerns about the variability and inconsistency of those studies. Therefore, persistent questions about the business case for CSR continued to frame the discussion in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Figure 2.1. Carroll's Pyramid of CSR (1991)**

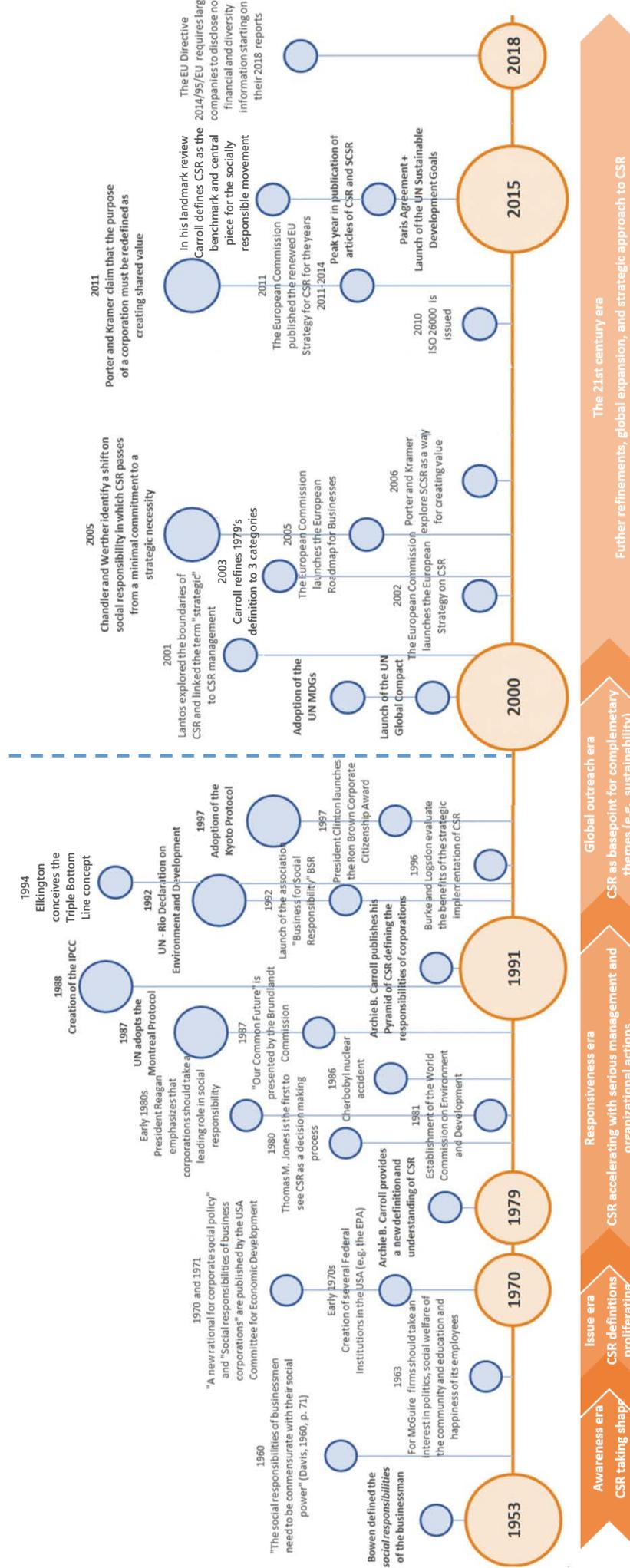
Source: Carroll (1991)

The recognition and expansion of CSR continued as we transitioned into the 2000s, especially as the Enron scandal dominated news headlines in the early 2000s and Wall Street's financial scandals wreaked havoc all over the globe in 2008 (Carroll & Shabana, 2010). Accordingly, the quest for the business case for CSR became overwhelmingly dominant during this period with the aim of assuring that CSR pays off. This brought forward the concept of strategic CSR (Carroll, 2021; Latapí Agudelo et al., 2019). Although the foundations of strategic CSR can be traced back by several decades (Burke & Logsdon, 1996; Carroll & Hoy, 1984), it was not until the 2000s that strategic CSR gained widespread attention following Lantos' (2001) article on "The boundaries of strategic corporate social responsibility," Werther and Chandler's (2005) article on "Strategic corporate social responsibility as global brand insurance," and Porter and Kramer's (2006) article on "Strategy and society: The link between competitive advantage and corporate social responsibility." Another related concept was "creating share value" (CSV), which was introduced by Kramer and Porter (2011). According to these scholars, CSV had the potential to reinvent capitalism and unleash a new wave of growth and innovation by connecting societal and economic progress. Despite its similarity to strategic CSR, there were slight differences in how CSV might be conceived and implemented. In more details, Kramer and Porter (2011: 4) claimed that "the purpose of the corporation must be redefined as creating shared value, not just profit per se," by reconceiving products that meet societal needs, redefining productivity in the value chain, and enabling the development of local clusters. Nevertheless, the concept has raised some criticisms. For instance, Crane, Palazzo, Spence, and Matten (2014) pointed out that it was naïve about business compliance, lacked originality, ignored the tensions inherent to responsible business activity, and was based on a shallow conception of the corporation's role in society. Given the debate between these two author groups, Carroll (2021: 1268) highlights the "still contested nature of both CSV and CSR." Indeed, the number of publications on the CSR topic in the Science Direct online data base has also tripled from 1097 in the year 2010 to 3321 in 2015 (Latapí Agudelo et al., 2019).

On the conceptual front, Schwartz and Carroll (2003) refined Carroll's (1979) four categories of CSR to three categories: economic, legal, and ethical. This three-domain approach, which collapses the philanthropic category into the ethical category, is more useful when discussing business ethics. Notably, Carroll (2015) conducted a landmark review of CSR concept evolution (e.g., stakeholder management, business ethics, corporate citizenship, sustainability, and creation of shared value, etc.) and concluded that all of these concepts are interrelated and overlapping with CSR as the benchmark and keystone of the socially responsible business movement. Besides this eruption of interest among academics, CSR also continued to gain global attention from the international community with the launch of the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) on July 2000. The UNGC gathered 44 global companies, six business associations, two labor organizations and twelve civil society organizations to encourage firms worldwide to adopt sustainable and socially responsible business practices (Latapí Agudelo et al., 2019). In the same year, the United Nations adopted the Millennium Declaration with its eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and set the international agenda for the following fifteen years. In 2010, the Committee on Consumer Policy of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) issued ISO 26000 as a guideline for businesses and organizations to operate in a socially responsible way. The year 2015 marked an important milestone with the launch of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by all 193 member states of the United Nations, which aims to achieve a better future for all. At the heart of "Agenda 2030" are the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which represent a "shared vision of humanity and a social contract between the world's leaders and the people." These new global goals arose from a process that had been more inclusive than ever, with governments involving business, civil society and citizens from the outset (UN, 2015). In addition, there were significant advances in Europe. Specifically, the promotion of CSR as a distinct European strategy began in 2002 with the "European Strategy on CSR" launched by the European Commission (EC). The EC also held a series of conferences on CSR in the period 2001–2004, which led to the launch of the "European Roadmap for Businesses – Towards a Competitive and Sustainable Enterprise" in 2005. In 2011, the European Union (EU) published a renewed CSR strategy for the period 2011–2014. It should be emphasized that the EU issued Directive 2014/95/EU, requiring large companies of public interest to disclose non-financial and diversity information in their reports from 2018 onward (EC, 2014).

Figure 2.2 provides a holistic view of the evolution of the CSR construct in its modern era by placing together all relevant aspects that are essential to the understanding of the construct, ranging from academic publications and social movements to the creation of legislation and organizations.

Figure 2.2. Synthesis of the evolution of the CSR construct from the 1950s



Source: Adapted from Latapí Agudelo et al. (2019)

Note: the size of the circles represents the level of influence each aspect/event had on the evolution of CSR (i.e., the bigger circle, the higher level of influence)

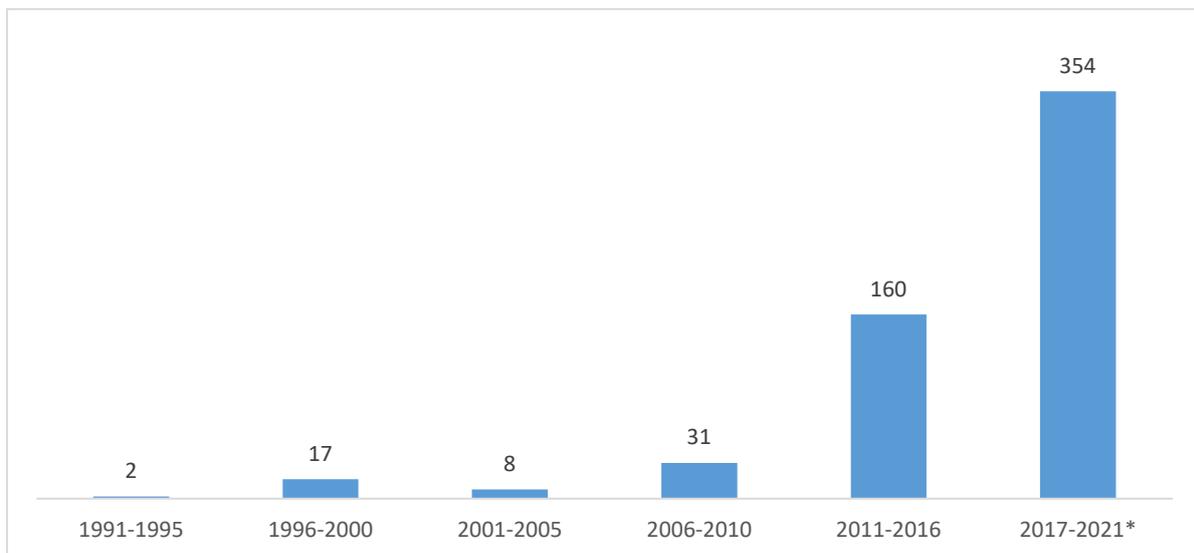
It can be seen from Figure 2.2 that the CSR concept has a grand history and will continue to be a vital part of both academic research and business practice in the future, especially as it addresses important public concerns about the relationship between business and society (Carroll, 2021). Notably, businesses' redefinition of their role and response to CSR, including the belief that businesses exist to serve the needs of society which emerged in the 1970s and since the 2000s the belief that CSR can translate into sustainable competitive advantages, have been major driving forces for CSR. Moreover, KPMG has pointed to a significant change in the liability landscape by stating that CSR reporting has become "de facto law for business" (KPMG, 2011). It is therefore important to clearly understand CSR. However, despite its long history, no consensus has been reached among scholars, practitioners and quasi-practitioners (Carroll, 2006, 2021; Carroll & Shabana, 2010). There are many different ways to think about: "to whom is a corporation responsible?", "for what is the corporation responsible?", "how should corporations behave?" (Carroll, 2021: 1275). Dahlsrud (2008) analyzed previous CSR definitions and identified the five most frequent dimensions, including: the stakeholder dimension (relative usage of this dimension, as measured by frequency counts performed via Google search, was 88%), the social dimension (88%), the economic dimension (86%), the voluntary dimension (80%), and the environmental dimension (59%). In addition, Dahlsrud (2008: 5) showed that there is a "97% probability that at least three of the dimensions are used in a random definition." This suggested that despite the lack of a single universally accepted definition, the existing definitions are fairly congruent. Therefore, the real challenge for business is not to define CSR at the conceptual level, but to understand how CSR is socially constructed in specific contexts and how to take this into account when developing business strategies at the operational level. The definitions describe CSR as a phenomenon, but neglect to provide any guidance on how business should manage CSR (Dahlsrud, 2008). This problem was also confirmed in other studies. For instance, van Marrewijk (2003: 103) stated that specific CSR interventions "can only be adequately addressed within a specific context and situation." Similarly, Sheehy (2015) has demonstrated that CSR is both complex and complicated due to the multifaceted nature of the problems, the context of the problems (e.g., actors, locations, institutions, etc.), and the inherent ambiguity of the issues (i.e., there is no clear idea of which issues need to be addressed, whose views will prevail on any particular set of issues, and the degree to which issues should be addressed). Globalization, in addition, has added another layer of complexity: the societal context in which business has to operate is changing rapidly, with new expectations of business from new stakeholders and different sets of national legislation (Carroll, 2021; Dahlsrud, 2008; van Marrewijk, 2003). In a similar vein, when reviewing the business case for CSR Carroll and Shabana (2010: 101) observed that "the benefits of CSR are not homogeneous, and effective CSR initiatives are not generic." Successful CSR strategies depend on mediating variables and situational contingencies. According to Porter and Kramer (2006: 85), to enable achievement of the full potential of CSR it is important to look "beyond community expectations to opportunities to achieve social and economic benefits simultaneously. It moves from mitigating harm to finding ways to reinforce corporate strategy by advancing social conditions." It should be noted that ever since the debate over CSR began, the economic business case for it has always been an endless quest (Baden & Harwood, 2013; Carroll, 2021; Carroll & Shabana, 2010). It is uncommon to come across an article or a chapter without any reference to Friedman's claim that the social responsibility of business is to make

profits, which leads to constant efforts in the literature to reconcile economic and social goals (Baden & Harwood, 2013; Vogel, 2007). To take one example, the phrase “doing good by doing well” is particularly popular as a way of capturing the win-win proposition of CSR (Kreps & Monin, 2011). This phrase has been used in the titles of numerous articles and yields hundreds of thousands of hits on the Internet. To put this number into perspective, Kreps and Monin (2011: 99) showed that “an internet search on the phrase yields over 600,000 hits – an impressive number when you know that the much simpler phrase “maximizing profit[-/s]” yields only 1,400,000 hits.” When it comes to the business case, the CSR pyramid developed by Carroll (1991) is particularly useful as it encompasses the entire range of business accountability—economic, legal, and ethical responsibilities. These categories of CSR not only encompass all the five dimensions mentioned earlier in the study of Dahlsrud (2008), but also address the motivations for CSR initiatives in each category (Carroll & Shabana, 2010).

Needless to say, in today’s world of fierce global competition, CSR can only be sustainable insofar as it fulfils the business case (Baden & Harwood, 2013; Crane et al., 2008: 42). For this reason, the relationship between CSR and corporate financial performance has sparked a monumental level of interest, with numerous studies and meta-analyses published concerning this topic (for example, a Google Scholar search for review articles including both the terms “CSR” and “corporate financial performance” in their titles yielded 967 results on October 14, 2022). Nevertheless, concentrating on the bottom-line financial benefits for businesses pursuing CSR represents only a narrow view of the business case for CSR. In an attempt to examine the rationales for adoption of CSR, Berger, Cunningham, and Drumwright (2007) proposed two models: the business-case model and the syncretic stewardship model, which represent the narrow and broad view of the business case for CSR. On the one hand, the business-case model represents the narrow view as CSR is only pursued when there is a clear link to the financial performance of a firm. The syncretic model, on the other hand, represents the broad view by recognizing both direct and indirect links between CSR and firm performance, hence acknowledging the complex relationship between the two variables. Such acknowledgment may allow businesses to identify and exploit opportunities that would not be recognized within the narrow view. Specifically, Kurucz, Colbert, and Wheeler (2008) proposed four categories of CSR business cases: (1) reducing cost and risk; (2) strengthening legitimacy and reputation; (3) building competitive advantage; and (4) creating win-win situations through synergistic value creation. For example, by adopting inclusive policies firms may be at a competitive advantage in recruiting from the widest possible talent pool, which will, in turn, increase their ability to employ high-performing employees (Jones & Willness, 2013). Employees are an important group of stakeholders in the firm. Although there are different stakeholder groups, “few stakeholders are as vital in a business as its workers. A worldwide company has to invest a great deal to respect all staff interests. Staff have a big interest in the success of the company” (Greenwood & Anderson, 2009: 186). In a similar vein, Quinn (1992: 241) pointed out that “with rare exceptions, the economic and producing power of the firm lies more in its intellectual and service capabilities than in its hard assets.” This is also reflected in the S&P 500’s market value. As of 2020, 90 percent of the value of the typical S&P 500 companies is represented by intangible assets such as talent and intellectual property (Ali, 2020). Thus, the primary focus of this thesis is on the relationship between CSR and non-

financial outcomes at the individual level of analysis, or, more precisely, applicant attraction to MNEs. This is because there is a significant knowledge gap in this area of CSR research. Aguinis and Glavas (2012) conducted a literature review of 588 journal articles and 102 books and book chapters about CSR and found that only 4% of the research focused on the individual level (or micro-level), compared to 57% which focused on the organizational level and 33% which focused on the institutional level. Following the review performed by Aguinis and Glavas (2012), research on micro-CSR has expanded rapidly. Still, less than 13% of CSR research adopted a micro-perspective (i.e., consideration of prospective and incumbent employees, including job applicants, managers, and executives) at the end of 2016 (Gond, El Akremi, Swaen, & Babu, 2017). Figure 2.3 provides an overview of the number of articles published on micro-level CSR from 1991 to 2021. Despite the fact that CSR takes place at the organizational level of analysis, it is individual actors that actually perceive such initiatives and take action as a result (e.g., intention to apply or to accept job offers). Moreover, such micro-level non-financial outcomes of CSR, particularly favorable applicant actions directly reflected in the applicant pool quantity and quality, are desirable, if not essential for organizational bottom-line financial performance and ultimately organizational success (Theurer, Tumasjan, Welppe, & Lievens, 2018). The next section of this thesis will take a closer look at the relationship between CSR and applicant attraction.

**Figure 2.3. Number of papers published on micro-level CSR from 1991 to 2021**



Source: Adapted from Gond et al. (2017)

\* Estimation from data provided by Xie and Jain (2022) and literature search using EBSCO.

## 2.2. CSR and Applicant Attraction

Unlike the review of Gond et al. (2017), this thesis adopts a narrower “person-centric perspective” and focuses solely on job applicants and prospective employees. A literature review of previous empirical studies that have examined the impact of CSR on job applicants was conducted through multiple computer-based literature searches of the Google Scholar, EBSCO, and Web of Science databases based on the use of relevant keywords (e.g., *corporate social responsibility*, *corporate social performance*, *social responsibility*, *corporate citizenship*, *employer attractiveness*, *organizational attractiveness*, *applicant attraction*,

recruitment, job preferences). The search results were checked against reference lists of previous literature reviews on CSR and employer branding (e.g., Gond et al. (2017); Jones, Newman, Shao, and Cooke (2019); Lievens and Slaughter (2016)). Ultimately, 37 articles were identified (see Table 2.1).

**Table 2.1. Overview of studies examining the impact of CSR on job applicants (the number of studies in each category is given in parentheses)**

Framing of CSR (e.g., how are applicants' perceptions of CSR initiatives organized/categorized?)		
Overall	Overall CSR (15)	Agnihotri and Bhattacharya (2021); Albinger and Freeman (2000); Alniacik, Alniacik, and Genc (2011); Burbano (2016); Dawkins, Jamali, Karam, Lin, and Zhao (2016); Duarte, Gomes, and das Neves (2014); Evans and Davis (2011); Gully, Phillips, Castellano, Han, and Kim (2013); Hong and Kim (2017); Joo, Moon, and Choi (2016); Klimkiewicz and Oltra (2017); Luce, Barber, and Hillman (2001); Pingle and Sharma (2013); Rupp, Shao, Thornton, and Skarlicki (2013); Turban and Greening (1997)
Focus on a single dimension	Environment (6)	Aiman-Smith, Bauer, and Cable (2001); Bauer and AimanSmith (1996); Behrend, Baker, and Thompson (2009); Berens, Riel, and van Rekom (2007); Guerci, Montanari, Scapolan, and Epifanio (2016); Jones, Willness, and Madey (2014)
	Community involvement (4)	Kim and Park (2011); Jones, Willness, and Heller (2016); Sen, Bhattacharya, and Korschun (2006); Waples and Brachle (2020)
Focus on different dimensions	Criterion-based view (e.g., Carroll's definition) (6)	Belinda, Westerman, and Bergman (2018); Lin, Tsai, Joe, and Chiu (2012); Montgomery and Ramus (2011); Tsai, Joe, Lin, and Wang (2014); Wang (2013); Zhang and Gowan (2012)
	Issue-based view (4)	Backhaus, Stone, and Heiner (2002); Greening and Turban (2000); Sorenson, Mattingly, and Lee (2010); Zhang, Cao, Zhang, Liu, and Li (2020)
	Stakeholder-based view (1)	Bridoux, Stofberg, and Den Hartog (2016)
Outcomes of Applicant Reactions to CSR <sup>1</sup>		
Attitudinal Outcomes		
Positive	Organizational attractiveness (22)	Agnihotri and Bhattacharya (2021); Aiman-Smith et al. (2001); Albinger and Freeman (2000); Backhaus et al. (2002); Bauer and AimanSmith (1996); Belinda et al. (2018); Duarte et al. (2014); Evans and Davis (2011); Guerci et al. (2016); Gully et al. (2013); Jones et al. (2016); Jones et al. (2014); Joo et al. (2016); Kim and Park (2011); <u>Klimkiewicz and Oltra (2017)</u> ; <u>Lin et al. (2012)</u> ; <u>Pingle and Sharma (2013)</u> ; Sen et al. (2006); Sorenson et al. (2010); Turban and Greening (1997); Waples and Brachle (2020); <u>Zhang et al. (2020)</u> ; Zhang and Gowan (2012)
	Job-pursuit intention and recommendation (15)	Aiman-Smith et al. (2001); <u>Alniacik et al. (2011)</u> ; Behrend et al. (2009); Berens et al. (2007); Bridoux et al. (2016); <u>Dawkins et al. (2016)</u> ; Greening and Turban (2000); Gully et al. (2013); Hong and Kim (2017); Kim and Park (2011); Rupp et al. (2013); Sen et al. (2006); <u>Tsai et al. (2014)</u> ; <u>Wang (2013)</u> ; Waples and Brachle (2020)
Negative	Skepticism and cynicism (1)	Jones et al. (2016)

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Behavioral Outcomes		
Positive	Job choice (1)	Montgomery and Ramus (2011)
	Wage requirement for small tasks in online labor marketplaces (1)	Burbano (2016)
Negative	Negative behaviors (0)	
Underlying Mechanisms <sup>2</sup>		
	Signaling mechanism (24)	Aiman-Smith et al. (2001); Albinger and Freeman (2000); Alniacik et al. (2011); Backhaus et al. (2002); Bauer and AimanSmith (1996); <b>Behrend et al. (2009)</b> [corporate reputation]; Belinda et al. (2018); Burbano (2016); <b>Duarte et al. (2014)</b> [corporate image]; Evans and Davis (2011); Greening and Turban (2000); Guerci et al. (2016); Gully et al. (2013); Hong and Kim (2017); <b>Jones et al. (2014)</b> [anticipated pride, perceived value fit, expected treatment]; Jones et al. (2016); Lin et al. (2012); Luce et al. (2001); Sen et al. (2006); Tsai et al. (2014); Turban and Greening (1997); <b>Wang (2013)</b> [corporate reputation, job advancement prospects]; Waples and Brachle (2020); <b>Zhang et al. (2020)</b> [corporate reputation]
	Social identity mechanism (7)	Berens et al. (2007); Duarte et al. (2014); Evans and Davis (2011); Greening and Turban (2000); Klimkiewicz and Oltra (2017); Sen et al. (2006); Turban and Greening (1997)
	Person-organization fit mechanism (3)	<b>Gully et al. (2013); Kim and Park (2011)</b> [perceived PO fit]; Zhang and Gowan (2012)
	Organizational justice mechanism (2)	<b>Joo et al. (2016)</b> [perceived organizational justice]; Rupp et al. (2013)
	Expectancy mechanism (2)	Lin et al. (2012); Wang (2013)
	Others (5): cue consistency mechanism; multimotive CSR framework; configural cue processing mechanism; relational models theory; theory of planned behavior	<b>Agnihotri and Bhattacharya (2021)</b> [CSR credibility]; <b>Bridoux et al. (2016)</b> [corporate trust]; Zhang and Gowan (2012); Sorenson et al. (2010); Dawkins et al. (2016)
Boundary Conditions		
Individual level	Personal beliefs about CSR importance (5)	Bauer and AimanSmith (1996); Behrend et al. (2009) [personal environmental stance]; Berens et al. (2007) [personal relevance of CSR information]; Evans and Davis (2011) [CSR education]; Tsai et al. (2014) [socio-environmental consciousness]
	Moral values (5)	Bridoux et al. (2016); Evans and Davis (2011) [other-orientation]; Greening and Turban (2000) [environmental values]; Gully et al. (2013) [desire to have a significant impact through work]; Rupp et al. (2013) [first-party distributive justice, moral identity]
	Socio-demographics (4)	Albinger and Freeman (2000) [levels of job choices]; Backhaus et al. (2002); Greening and Turban (2000) [gender]; Dawkins et al. (2016) [culture]
	Attributions of CSR motives (2)	Rupp et al. (2013); Sen et al. (2006)
	Personality traits (1)	Zhang and Gowan (2012) [Machiavellianism vs. Utilitarianism]

Meso level	CEO activism (1)	Agnihotri and Bhattacharya (2021)
	Corporate reputation and ability (2)	Guerci et al. (2016); Kim and Park (2011)
	Pay level (1)	Waples and Brachle (2020)
	Presentation medium— websites/social media (1)	Belinda et al. (2018)
Macro level	Firm's country of origin (1)	Hong and Kim (2017)

<sup>1</sup> Studies that were conducted in emerging markets are underlined.

<sup>2</sup> Studies that directly tested the mechanisms implied by theories are in bold, and the actual mediators are provided in square brackets.

### 2.2.1. Framing of CSR

CSR, as a loaded construct, can be specified and differentiated in many ways. For example, early studies adopted an issue-based view in which CSR perceptions were defined and measured according to corporate involvement in various environmental, social, and ethical issues. Nevertheless, this approach has been criticized for lacking theoretical justification for the selection of specific issues (Gond et al., 2017). There is, moreover, a tendency to focus solely on more discretionary dimensions of CSR, such as environmental practices (Aiman-Smith et al., 2001; Guerci et al., 2016) or community involvement (Jones et al., 2014; Kim & Park, 2011; Waples & Brachle, 2020), leaving the economic dimension (beyond profit) under-examined. However, the fact remains that job applicants are increasingly concerned about the economic sustainability of potential employers; there is a prevalent fear of mass layoffs, poverty and financial risk to governments and public programs, particularly when facing the enduring global economic recession that began in 2008, and the recent crisis resulting from the COVID-19 outbreak in tandem with the present global energy crisis (Laborde, Martin, & Vos, 2020). To address these limitations, a few studies have adopted criterion-based views of CSR based on Carroll's (1991) definition, which encompasses the entire range of business accountability—economic, legal, and ethical responsibilities. Yet this categorization might not be very effective in distinguishing between external and internal forms of CSR (Glavas & Godwin, 2013). Another approach proposes a stakeholder-based view of CSR in which CSR perceptions are framed according to corporations' treatment of their stakeholders. Bridoux et al. (2016) distinguished between self-directed CSR (CSR towards the stakeholders' own group, i.e., employees) and other-directed CSR (CSR towards other stakeholder groups, i.e., suppliers in developing countries or environment). Although different approaches have been applied, they have been criticized due to construct deficiency and other validation-related weaknesses (Jones et al., 2019).

Furthermore, it should be noted that despite the increase of studies pertaining to different aspects of CSR, many previous studies, including recently published ones, have only examined CSR's overall effects with a composite approach (e.g., Alniacik et al., 2011; Burbano, 2016; Dawkins et al., 2016; Evans & Davis, 2011; Hong & Kim, 2017). Zhao, Wu, Chen, and Zhou (2022) have urged caution in integrating different CSR dimensions into one overall measure because this presents a risk of confounding the effects of different CSR dimensions. Not all

CSR aspects are equally impactful. Their effects “may differ in strength and form, and certainly differ in the history and depth of their study” (Jones et al., 2019: 298).

Few studies have compared the relative impacts of different CSR dimensions. Backhaus et al. (2002) applied direct estimation (i.e., by directly asking respondents to rate the importance of different CSR aspects) and found that environment, community, employee, and diversity issues are important to applicants. Greening and Turban (2000) conducted an experiment in which different CSR issues were manipulated and found that diversity, environment, employee relations, and product quality have the largest impacts on attractiveness ratings. Nevertheless, such comparative tests of different CSR dimensions’ unique effects might be hampered by the multicollinearity problem, especially as they rule out potentially substantive variance shared among different CSR issues stemming from common causes or trade-offs between various attributes (Jones & Willness, 2013). It is therefore worthwhile for researchers to specify a more holistic, configural view of the examined inter-relationships between multiple CSR information cues.

It is important to mention is that, regardless of how CSR is framed, previous work on CSR image and recruitment has failed to address how job applicants process CSR information and become aware of a company’s CSR activities. Participants in previous studies processed CSR information simply because they were provided with CSR information (Jones & Willness, 2013). A common practice in CSR-recruitment research is to provide participants with written vignettes, organizational website printouts or recruitment brochures as stimulus materials and to directly give out information on the company’s CSR activities (Behrend et al., 2009; Evans & Davis, 2011; Hong & Kim, 2017; Jones et al., 2014). This approach has failed to address applicants’ motivation to look for CSR information and how they process CSR information.

### **2.2.2. Outcomes of Applicant Reactions to CSR**

Table 2.1 reveals that CSR triggers multiple attitudinal and behavioral outcomes among job applicants. It can be observed that the dominant focus has been on attitudinal outcomes, leaving behavioral outcomes under-researched. In addition, most research has been conducted in developed markets, and thus lacks an international perspective. It remains unclear whether the findings drawn from samples in developed markets hold in emerging markets or whether cross-national differences exist, particularly when those in emerging markets are embedded in different institutional, social, and cultural environments.

With regard to attitudinal outcomes, previous studies have focused primarily on positive outcomes, such as enhanced organizational attractiveness (e.g., Jones et al., 2014; Waples & Brachle, 2020; Zhang et al., 2020; Zhang & Gowan, 2012) and job-pursuit intention (e.g., Behrend et al., 2009; Bridoux et al., 2016; Wang, 2013). Specifically, Aiman-Smith et al. (2001: 221) defined organizational attractiveness as “an attitude or expressed general positive affect toward an organization, toward viewing the organizational as a desirable entity with which to initiate some relationship.” This maps to Barber’s (1998) first phase of recruitment, in which applicants evaluate the overall desirability of a potential association with an organization. Job-pursuit intention differs from organizational attractiveness in that it is more active. Aiman-Smith et al. (2001: 221) defined job-pursuit intention as “the intention to take action to find out more information about an organization, to contact the organization, and to try to secure an

interview with the organization.” This maps to Barber’s (1998) second stage of recruitment: a more intensive search, in which applicants become actively engaged in pursuing a job within an organization. The positive impact of CSR on organizational attractiveness and job-pursuit intention has been documented in the literature, but so far extant research has been virtually silent about negative attitudinal outcomes (i.e., whether and why some applicants are indifferent to or even repulsed by an employer’s CSR). A study by Jones et al. (2016) represents the first examination of the negative effects of CSR on applicants. The authors found that a few applicants reported being less attracted to employers’ CSR initiatives due to skepticism and cynicism, which implies a fruitful area for future research to advance CSR-recruitment theory and to inform recruitment practice (Jones et al., 2016).

While the positive effects of CSR are observed in the earlier stages of the recruitment process, it is not yet known whether these positive effects hold during later recruitment stages and eventually on job choice behavior (Gond et al., 2017; Jones & Willness, 2013). Even though organizational attractiveness and job-pursuit intention are significant antecedents of job choice, researchers should be cautious about treating them as proxies for job choice itself (Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin, & Jones, 2005; Rynes, 1991). Interestingly, Burbano (2016) conducted randomized field experiments in online labor marketplaces and found that CSR marginally reduced workers’ wage requirements. Concerns about the irregular and short-term characteristics of online marketplaces (i.e., Amazon Mechanical Turk and Elance) call into question the validity of the findings in the common employer-employee relationship in which employees work within an organization and for a longer period of time. Nevertheless, Burbano’s (2016) findings can serve as a basis for future studies on how CSR is related to expected and accepted employee rewards. Further research on this question will not only extend current knowledge of CSR-related outcomes, but also practically strengthen the business case for CSR.

### **2.2.3. Underlying Mechanisms Explaining the Effects of CSR on Applicants**

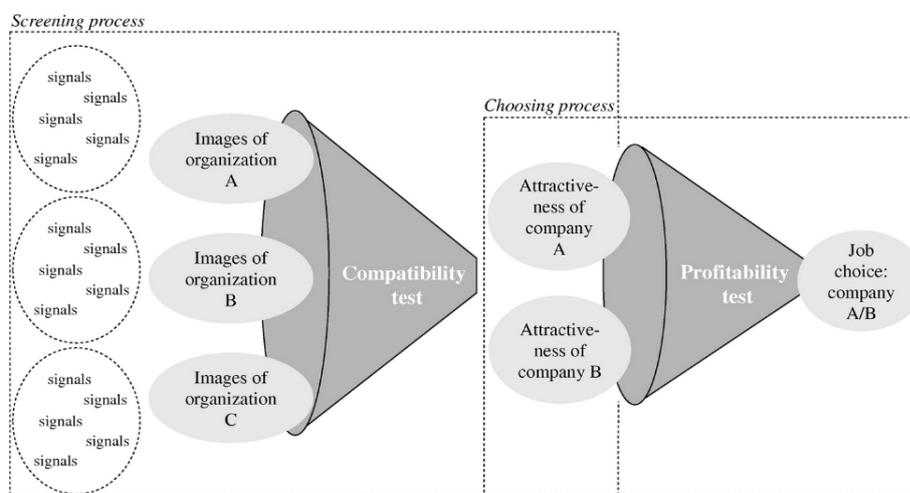
An intriguing question arises as to why applicants are concerned with not only tangible benefits (e.g., pay and advancement opportunities) but also CSR when choosing an employer. Two major theoretical mechanisms have emerged from the literature.

#### **Signaling Mechanisms**

The underlying mechanisms most frequently used to explain the effects of CSR on applicants come from signaling theory (24 studies). Signaling theory (Spence, 1973) is typically concerned with the use of signals to address information asymmetries between two parties. In the recruitment context, applicants, as external stakeholders, usually possess little knowledge of the working conditions in a recruiting organization. To reduce the initial information asymmetries, they tend to use the limited information on hand as signals in order to make inferences about working conditions and other unknown organizational characteristics (Rynes, 1991; Spence, 1973). CSR, as an indicator of an organization’s concerns for others beyond its immediate interests and legal requirements, serves as a pertinent signal which allows applicants to infer how they would be treated if they joined the organization (Gond et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2014).

Held and Bader (2018) have illustrated an applicant's job choice process based on signaling theory (see Figure 2.4). Specifically, it consists of two processes (Beach, 1993; Held & Bader, 2018; Spence, 1973). The first is the screening process in which applicants absorb signals about different potential future employers and eliminate those that are not compatible with their values and principles from the pool of potential employers. For example, when evaluating potential employers, applicants may discard those with human rights violations under “sweatshop” conditions in developing countries as this is incompatible with their values. In this process, non-compensatory or non-negotiable decision rules are applied to eliminate options that do not meet applicants' cutoffs. The second is the choosing process, in which applicants continue to examine the options still remaining after the screening process and choose to pursue jobs with the employer that offers the highest profitability in order to achieve their goals (Beach, 1993; Held & Bader, 2018; Spence, 1973).

**Figure 2.4. Applicants' job choice process based on signaling theory**



Source: Held and Bader (2018)

Despite their frequent use, signaling mechanisms have been criticized for being overused and misapplied in recruitment research (Gond et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2014; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). Specifically, many studies have used the term “signaling theory” to justify and develop hypotheses about the influence of CSR on recruitment outcomes, without directly testing or even conceptually specifying the precise inferences that applicants draw from CSR signals. Table 2.1 reveals that only five in 24 studies that used signaling theory actually unpacked the underlying mediation process by signaling mechanism (Behrend et al., 2009; Duarte et al., 2014; Jones et al., 2014; Wang, 2013; Zhang et al., 2020). For instance, Jones et al. (2014) identified three signal-based mechanisms that explain why CSR enhances organizational attractiveness: applicants' anticipated pride and prestige, perception of value fit, and expected treatment. Therefore, the field would be advanced with more direct tests of the signal inferences implied by the theory (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). Moreover, enhancing the understanding of the underlying mechanisms has important implications for guiding recruitment practice to leverage CSR in hiring talent, thereby boosting the return on CSR investments and facilitating the justification of additional investments (Jones & Willness, 2013).

### **Social Identity Mechanisms**

Social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel, 1974) emerged from the review as the second most common theoretical explanation for the effects of CSR on applicants (7 studies). The theory grew out of the work of Tajfel (1974), which showed that individuals are well aware of their membership in certain groups and perceive their membership to have notable emotional and/or tangible value to them. There are two main motives for social identification. Firstly, social identity fulfils a protective function for the self by promoting self-esteem, which is also known as positive distinctiveness. Secondly, social identity serves as an uncertainty reduction function, because identifying with social groups makes one more assured of his or her position in society (Abrams & Hogg, 1988). For these reasons, identifying with groups is essential to a person's self-concept and self-esteem, and "the employing organization is no exception" (Carter & Highhouse, 2014: 455). Indeed, Ashforth and Mael (1989) depicted organizational identification as a specific case of social identity in the recruitment context. This implies that the self-image of an employee is influenced by his or her membership with an organization. A person's choice of employers and workplaces, in addition, serves as a social identity function conveying the person's deeply held values (Cable & Graham, 2000), and people use these choices to deduce more information about the jobholder (Carter & Highhouse, 2014). This view accords with that of Wallace Stevens (1951): "It is often said of a man that his work is autobiographical in spite of every subterfuge." Accordingly, as job applicants are aware of these potential inferences, they will select jobs in organizations that best fit their needs and social-identity concerns (Schneider, 1987). Highhouse, Thornbury, and Little (2007) identified two primary social-identity concerns that are particularly relevant to applicants in their job choice, namely social-adjustment and value-expression concerns. Social-adjustment concerns (i.e., the need to impress) relate to the impulse to be perceived as impressive by significant others. Some items comprising social-adjustment concerns include "I want to work for company that is perceived to be impressive," and "I would consider how impressive my family thinks working for the company would be" (Highhouse et al., 2007: 140). Value-expression concerns (i.e., the need to express), on the other hand, relate to the need to express socially approved and good values. Some items comprising social-adjustment concerns include "I want to be proud of the company I work for," and "I would hope that the company has an honorable reputation in the community" (Highhouse et al., 2007: 140). These two types of concern are similar to the self-promotion (i.e., convincing others that you deserve respect) and exemplification needs (i.e., convincing others that you are a good person) proposed by Jones and Pittman (1982).

Drawing from the functional approach, Highhouse et al. (2007), in addition, provide an elaborated mechanism of symbolic attraction, suggesting that applicants select jobs with organizations that possess symbolic images (i.e., organizational descriptions in terms of subjective and intangible attributes) in accordance with their social-identity concerns and sense of self. To obtain a more detailed understanding of this mechanism, it is important to discuss a firm's image *for* something, rather than its image *per se* (Barich & Kotler, 1991), especially as Tom (1971: 576) described an organization's image as a "loose structure of knowledge, belief, and feelings" about the firm that "may be induced from the way that the firm deals with its employees, clients or customers, and society." Highhouse et al. (2007) propose that symbolic

image inferences are translated into general impressions of impressiveness and respectability, which map onto the two primary social-identity concerns of applicants in their job choice: social-adjustment and value-expression concerns. Inferences of both impressiveness and respectability are important and assert positive impacts on applicant attraction to an organization, but differentially appeal to applicants depending on their social-identity concerns. Researchers have noted that signals about organizational endeavors for CSR are associated with valued characteristics such as empathy, honor and integrity. This gives a respectable impression, thus meeting their need for value expression and ultimately increasing their attraction to the organization (Greening & Turban, 2000; Highhouse et al., 2007; Kim & Park, 2011).

Although previous studies have relied on social identity as an explanatory framework, none actually tested whether identification is the underlying mechanism that links CSR to recruitment outcomes.

#### **2.2.4. Boundary Conditions of CSR-Recruitment Outcome Relationships**

Researchers have identified several moderators of the relationship between CSR and recruitment outcomes. In particular, much attention has been centered on the moderating effects of individual differences such as gender (Greening & Turban, 2000), levels of job choice (Albinger & Freeman, 2000), personal beliefs about the importance of CSR (Behrend et al., 2009; Tsai et al., 2014), moral identity (Bridoux et al., 2016; Evans & Davis, 2011; Rupp et al., 2013), or personality traits (Zhang & Gowan, 2012). For example, Greening and Turban (2000) examined whether gender moderates the effects of a firm's treatment of women and minorities on applicant attraction to the firm. Interestingly, the results revealed that men and women are equally attracted to firms with good treatment of women and minorities, but women are less attracted to firms with poor treatment of women and minorities than men are. Zhang and Gowan (2012) found that Machiavellian applicants are less attracted to firms with high legal and ethical performance because they prefer loosely structured firms in which they have more opportunities to exploit the situation for personal gain.

While the vast majority of existing research focuses on the influence of individual-level factors, very few studies have examined meso- and macro-level moderators. This dearth of research exemplifies a gap across levels in micro-CSR studies. Bridging this gap is particularly pertinent in the inherently complex and multilevel context of international recruitment. In today's globalized work context, applicants are increasingly exposed to firms from different countries of origin. Yet, it is not known whether CSR signals are evaluated differently according to MNEs' countries of origin.

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### **3. Study 1: Employer Attractiveness of EMNEs – The Role of CSR in Overcoming Country-of-Origin Image Constraints in Developed Host Countries<sup>5</sup>**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

Emerging market multinational enterprises (EMNEs) have increasingly expanded their operations worldwide, not only in other emerging markets but also in developed countries (Hennart, 2012; Shirodkar & Shete, 2022). Nevertheless, these EMNEs often lack firm-specific assets like internalized knowledge (Meyer & Xin, 2018). Thus, they need to attract local talent with the right know-how to develop the firm-specific advantages that they have so far lacked in competition with more advanced competitors from Western countries (Held & Bader, 2018; Law, Song, Wong, & Chen, 2009).

Acquiring qualified workforce is crucial for all MNEs in the ever-intensifying competition for scarce highly skilled employees, called “war for talent.” Indeed, companies are struggling more than ever to fill open positions - nearly 7 in 10 employers worldwide cannot find the right skills they need, which is the highest value in the last 15 years, according to Manpower Group’s annual Talent Shortage Survey (ManpowerGroup, 2022). This issue is more relevant and challenging for EMNEs since they suffer from double disadvantages of liabilities of foreignness plus liabilities of emergingness (Zhang, Zhou, van Gorp, & van Witteloostuijn, 2020). Therefore, the question arises as how EMNEs can compete with developed market multinational enterprises (DMNEs) in the labour markets of developed countries and become more attractive to prospective applicants. So far, researchers have closely looked into applicant attraction of DMNEs. However, little attention is devoted to how EMNEs can attract and acquire local potential employees in developed countries (Held & Bader, 2018; Meyer & Xin, 2018). Addressing this question is vital to the continuing international growth of EMNEs. Based on a report of UNCTAD (2019), outward investment of developing economies was \$418 billion, accounting for 41% of the global outflows. The number of EMNEs in Fortune Global 500 also increased more than twofold, from 69 in 2007 to 164 in 2017 (Luo & Tung, 2018). In Forbes Global 2000, China has grown from only 43 companies in 2003 to 351 in 2022 (Forbes, 2022).

To overcome country-of-origin image constraints on hiring local talent in developed markets, EMNEs have been recommended to send out signals about otherwise unobservable characteristics of the firms, such as good human resource (HR) practices (Holtbrügge & Kreppel, 2015) or corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Jones, Willness, & Madey, 2014). In particular, previous research has shown that elementary HR practices, like career opportunities or pay, have become less useful to attract talents in developed countries due to the interchangeability of jobs and company profiles within the same industry. Consequently, CSR is becoming more important for firms to differentiate themselves from their competitors and to attract qualified employees (Greening & Turban, 2000; Jones et al., 2014; Zhang, Cao, Zhang,

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Liu, & Li, 2020). Therefore, we suggest that CSR is an instrument worth considering for EMNEs to close the attractiveness gap to DMNEs in developed countries. Furthermore, although literature has examined the impact of firms' CSR on job applicants, drawing upon signaling theory, little is known about the underlying mechanisms and contingency factors. For example, some applicants (the receivers of the signal) may interpret the same CSR signal differently from other receivers stemming from distrust of the firm's motives. Indeed, Gond, El Akremi, Swaen, and Babu (2017) conclude their study by calling for further research that provides "integrative analyses of the drivers of CSR and the boundary conditions and mechanisms underlying individual reactions to CSR."

Responding to this call, we use an experimental approach and adopt a multi-level perspective to investigate the effect of macro-level country-of-origin, firm-level CSR engagement and micro-level individual skepticism on job-pursuit intention to find out how CSR helps mitigate the negative effect of being an emerging market firm on hiring talent in developed markets. Particularly, we create different hypothetical corporation career webpages based on career pages of real multinational companies and observe applicants' behaviors on these sites. We chose websites as the communicating means because websites have become an increasingly prevalent source of recruitment information. Prior research, e.g., Behrend, Baker, and Thompson (2009); Jones et al. (2014), used website printouts in their studies. Nevertheless, only real, interactive websites allow to track respondents' behaviors.

This study contributes to the literature in the following ways. First, the study extends the CSR research on employee recruitment by adding a country-level factor, namely country-of-origin. Although companies' CSR engagement has long been suggested to help attract talent in the literature, previous studies were mainly conducted in the domestic context, particularly in Western countries (Maon, Vanhamme, De Roeck, Lindgreen, & Swaen, 2019), leaving country-level factors an under-researched area. One exception is the study of Hong and Kim (2017), which is set in the international recruiting context. Specifically, they investigated Korean applicants' job-pursuit intentions to US and Chinese MNE. These findings, however, could be subjected to limited generalizability due to using only two countries of origin, US as developed and China as emerging markets. To fill this gap, we investigate these underlying issues on MNEs from ten countries, five developed and five emerging markets, operating in Switzerland, Germany, and Austria. These three host countries are highly developed German-speaking countries, all in the top 25 most attractive destinations for FDI for five years in a row, according to Kearney (2019)'s FDI Confidence Index, representing an appropriate study context.

Second, the study brings the concept of country-of-origin image from marketing into international recruitment research. To date, most conceptualization focuses primarily on the relationship between country images and consumer's product perception despite the fact that country-of-origin image has a broad effect not only on consumers but also on foreign investors or employees (Buhmann & Ingenhoff, 2015).

Third, we take into account applicants' skepticism, a key challenge of CSR communication (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010). There are two different forms of skepticism: situational skepticism, "which is a momentary state of distrust of an actor's motivations," and

skepticism as a trait of individuals, “which is an individual's on-going tendency to be suspicious of other people's motives” (Forehand & Grier, 2003). In this study, we focus on the former and control for the later. This will contribute to the advancement of knowledge of individual-level outcomes of CSR. According to a review of Aguinis and Glavas (2012), while differential outcomes of CSR have long been studied, only 4% of the empirical work examined these outcomes at the individual level.

Fourth, we explore the potential of using behavioral experiments to complement the survey-based methods in international business (IB) research. The extant literature has called for the use of experiments as they are mostly absent from the IB research (Zellmer-Bruhn, Caligiuri, & Thomas, 2016). Thus, we believe that the methodological innovation proposed in this study will make a contribution to the IB literature.

Last but not least, this study addresses applicants' willingness to search for CSR information of a firm, which is a determinant of their awareness of the firm's CSR activities. Researchers find that the general public's awareness of companies' CSR activities is typically low, representing a serious impediment in firms' attempts to maximize benefits from CSR engagement (Bhattacharya, Sen, & Korschun, 2008; Du et al., 2010). The reason is that the general public rarely proactively seeks information about CSR, even for the issues important to them (Dawkins, 2005). Despite its importance, no prior studies addressed willingness to search for CSR information in international recruitment context. Particularly, in previous studies, the authors manipulate CSR by directly giving out information on the company's CSR activities. However, in reality it is not that straightforward. Therefore, in our study, potential applicants have to actively look for CSR information on companies' websites to explore their motivation to look for information, especially on CSR.

The study is organized as follows: in the next section, we introduce the theoretical background leading to our hypotheses. We then describe the used methodology. Finally, we present our findings and theoretical as well as practical implications.

### **3.2. Theoretical Background**

The study is based on signaling theory and on attribution theory. Signaling theory is typically concerned with the use of signals to address information asymmetries between two parties (Rynes, 1989; Spence, 1973). With regard to recruitment context, prospective applicants usually have limited information on a company in the beginning phase of job-choice decision and consequently tend to use the information on hand as signals to reduce initial information asymmetries between the recruiting firms and themselves (Baum & Kabst, 2013). Thus, being the sender of signals, companies often use signals of their interest to convey positive attributes in an effort to influence applicants' attraction. However, applicants might also be driven by signals which companies can hardly influence. Country-of-origin characteristics, for instance, are not controlled by companies and may serve as signals to shape an individual's country image, leading to a rather poor job characteristics of companies from emerging markets (Froese, Vo, & Garrett, 2010; Held & Bader, 2018). For that reason, EMNEs should send out information about their CSR serving as signals in order to be associated with better corporate characteristics.

It is noteworthy, however, that not all applicants (the signal receivers) will interpret the same CSR signal the same way. Some empirical studies have found undesirable effects of CSR initiatives and communications on job applicants, stemming from individual inherent differences and CSR skepticism (Joo, Moon, & Choi, 2016; Maon et al., 2019). Thus, it is necessary to add a more nuanced perspective on the effect of CSR signaling. On this basis, attribution theory, which specifically addresses the processes by which individuals evaluate the motives of others and explains how these perceived motives influence subsequent attitudes and behaviors, provides an appropriate analysis framework. Specifically, people will refrain from making correspondent inferences about other's positive dispositions and engage in more extensive attributional reasoning whenever they have reason to suspect the ulterior motives (Forehand & Grier, 2003; Yoon, Gurhan-Canli, & Schwarz, 2006). This is relevant since positive CSR information of EMNEs, which may be at odds with the expectations of applicants given the negative presumption of emerging country-of-origin image, would further trigger extensive attributional processing, and consequently influence subsequent attitudes and behaviors of the applicants. Our research hypotheses will be further analyzed in the following.

### **3.3. Hypotheses**

#### **3.3.1. Country-of-Origin**

Researchers have found that MNEs' country-of-origin has effects on applicants' perceptions about the attractiveness of MNEs as employers and thus on their job-pursuit intention through country-of-origin image signaling (Froese et al., 2010; Hong & Kim, 2017). Froese et al. (2010) have identified three signals constituting country-of-origin image particularly in the recruiting setting. The first is perception of general human resource practice or norm of companies from a certain country. Previous cross-national studies show that different aspects of employer image are valued differently across different countries and cultures, except for career-enhancing opportunities and good working environment which have unchanged high levels of importance to applicants in varied countries (Alniaçık, Alniaçık, Erat, & Akçin, 2014; Baum & Kabst, 2013). Since DMNEs are more likely perceived as offering better career-enhancing opportunities and working environment than EMNEs, they would be more attractive to applicants (Froese et al., 2010; Meyer & Xin, 2018).

The second is perception of in-group favoritism of people from a country. According to sociological research, if people from the home country of a MNE exhibit in-group favoritism, they are inclined to favor those who are similar to themselves, e.g. same nationality (Tajfel, 1974). As a result, employees from other countries will be less likely to get promoted compared to those from home country, thus, the less attracted they will be to MNEs from countries with high in-group favoritism. Researchers have found that higher-status, higher-income and more globalized nations, attributes of developed countries, exhibit a lower degree of in-group favoritism, in line with the notion of inequality aversion (Dorrough & Glockner, 2016; Tanaka & Camerer, 2016). Indeed, surveys conducted by Clark and Hoque (2012) reveal that Chinese and Latin Americans, representing emerging nations, show a greater national in-group favoritism than US Americans, epitomizing developed ones. Similarly, in a 73-nation study, Van de Vliert (2011) finds that in-group favoritism is significantly higher in South America, Asia, Africa than in Europe, Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand. Therefore,

applicants would be less attracted and have less intention to apply to EMNEs because emerging countries are expected to exhibit a higher in-group favoritism.

The final is perception of technological development or industry expertise of a country. Applicants would have a more positive attitude towards technically advanced countries because when working for companies from more advanced countries they can learn from the superior system and upgrade their technological skills. Although nowadays many emerging countries stand out with high growth rates, they still tend to be stereotyped as late developers with low-cost labor, poor transparency and weaker technological and innovative capacities as compared to developed countries (Held & Bader, 2018). This poor country image negatively affects even the world-leading EMNEs, for example the case of Huawei, the Chinese telecoms giant. Despite being a global high-tech leader, it faces doubts and strong opposition in the US and Europe (Zhang, He, Zhou, & van Gorp, 2019). EMNEs, being based in less developed economies, are perceived as less technically advanced as DMNEs, thus, they would be less attractive to applicants.

Derived from the above, country-of-origin image signaling is more likely to be less favorable for EMNEs as compared to DMNEs, leading to a liability of emergingness (Held & Bader, 2018). Thus, applicants would have lower job-pursuit intention to EMNEs. This gives rise to the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1: Emerging country-of-origin (vs. developed country-of-origin) of an MNE reduces the job-pursuit intention of potential applicants.*

### **3.3.2. CSR**

CSR, which can be broadly defined as “a company’s commitment to minimizing or eliminating any harmful effects and maximizing its long-run beneficial impact on society” (Mohr, Webb, & Harris, 2001), is at the forefront on the global corporate agenda in today’s socially conscious market environment (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2007). There is evidence from both academic research and marketplace polls that important stakeholders like consumers, employees, and investors incline to take actions to reward good firms and punish bad ones. For instance, Montgomery and Ramus (2011) conducted a study on what MBAs from North America and Europe in the 21st century care about during their job search and they found that CSR was ranked in the top five most important factors, being almost as important as salary (relative importance of CSR compared to the top-criterion salary was 95%). In addition, a recent survey of Deloitte (2019) reported that 38% of millennials and Gen Z have backed away from companies that negatively impact the environment and society. Especially, the recent pandemic Covid-19 has brought about an even stronger sense of individual responsibility in both generations with nearly three-fourths intending to take actions to make positive impact on their communities (Deloitte, 2020). They expect business to reflect the same commitment to focusing on social and environmental sustainability. With increasing stakeholders’ expectations and intensifying global competition, firms in general and MNEs in particular are constantly striving to be, or at least to appear, socially responsible (Crifo, Diaye, & Pekovic, 2016; Vaara & Tienari, 2008). KPMG (2017) indicates that the G250 CSR reporting rate rocketed from only

35% in 1999 to over 90% in 2017. The question for managers is no longer whether to engage in CSR activities or not, but how to do so (Carroll, Lipartito, Post, & Werhane, 2012).

Before analyzing the impacts of CSR on business, it is important to take into account stakeholders' CSR awareness. Firms cannot yield any good returns to CSR if stakeholders are unaware of their CSR (Du et al., 2010). Stakeholders' CSR awareness is contingent upon their willingness to search for CSR information. In the job-choice process, applicants will be motivated to process more information about a firm when the benefits from engaging in the information processing outweigh the costs associated with such processing (Cable & Turban, 2001). Thus, they will be more motivated to look for information about a potential employer when they possess little knowledge of the firm than when they have extensive knowledge. Since EMNEs are not present as long as DMNEs in developed markets, applicants from these markets usually have less knowledge about EMNEs than about DMNEs (Held & Bader, 2018). This lack of knowledge will motivate them to look for more information about EMNEs. Specifically, applicants in developed markets would be more concerned about CSR information of EMNEs which compensates for the prevalent institutional voids in the home countries. In contrast, when assessing MNEs originated from similar strong institutional environment (DMNEs), they can be assured that responsible social conducts have been institutionalized (Mazboudi, Sidani, & Al Ariss, 2020), hence searching for additional CSR information is less necessary. Therefore, we hypothesize:

*Hypothesis 2: Emerging country-of-origin of an MNE (vs. developed country-of-origin) increases the willingness of potential applicants to search for CSR information of the MNE.*

Mainly drawing upon signaling and social-identity theory, scholars have extensively studied the effects of CSR and found that CSR increases applicants' perception of organizational attractiveness and job-pursuit intention, (Backhaus, Stone, & Heiner, 2002; Behrend et al., 2009; Evans & Davis, 2011; Greening & Turban, 2000; Jones et al., 2014; Kim & Park, 2011; Rupp, Shao, Thornton, & Skarlicki, 2013). According to Jones et al. (2014), CSR influences applicants' job-pursuit intention through three signal-based mechanisms: expected treatment or working environment, person-organization fit, and anticipated pride from being associated with the organization. Social-identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), in addition, suggests that self-image of an employee is influenced by his or her membership in an organization. Thus, it is reasonable to infer that applicants are more likely to pursue a job with companies engaging in CSR as it contributes to their positive self-image (Greening & Turban, 2000). By extending these findings to the context of international recruitment, local applicants may have limited information about foreign MNEs as compared to domestic companies. Thus, MNEs can engage in CSR to signal a good working environment, thereby increasing their attractiveness as a potential employer to local applicants. Yet, it remains unknown whether CSR signals are evaluated differently based on the firm's country-of-origin. Therefore, the interaction between CSR and a macro-level factor - country-of-origin of MNEs is of greater interest of this study. Combining reputation theory from economics with role theory from sociology, Jensen, Kim, and Kim (2012) argue that reputation and reputational signals become most salient when it is incongruent with role expectations. In other words, identical signals may

have different effects for different actors. We, therefore, expect CSR to have great value for EMNEs to mitigate the negative effect of unfavorable country-of-origin image on job-pursuit intention. It gives them a positive image element and provides a company characteristic that applicants may otherwise not expect from an EMNE. In contrast, DMNEs already benefit from a more favorable country-of-origin image, so CSR signaling is likely to provide little additional information, resulting in a weaker positive effect on applicants' job-pursuit intention. Thus, we assume that:

*Hypothesis 3: CSR perception weakens the negative relationship between emerging country-of-origin of an MNE and job-pursuit intention.*

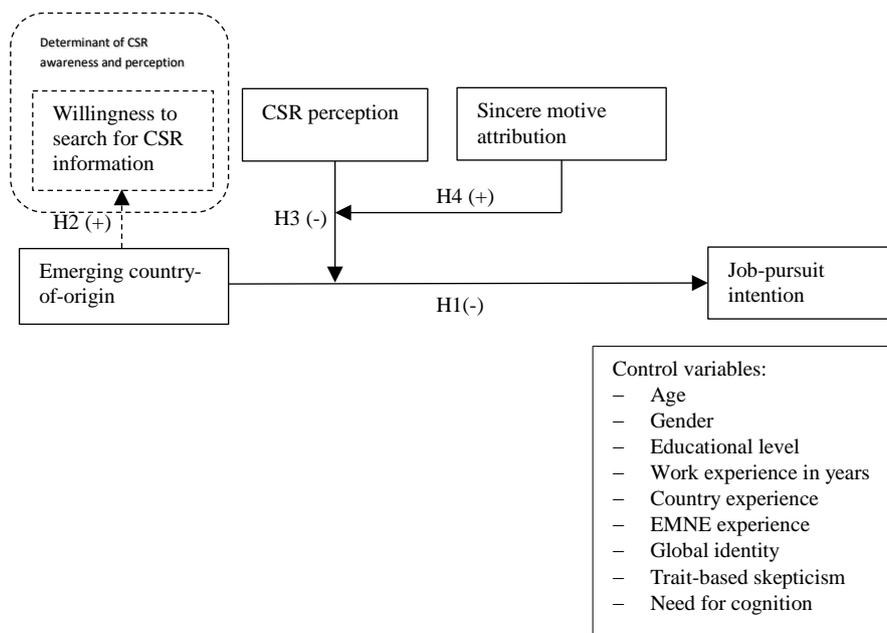
### **3.3.3. Situational Skepticism**

Even though researchers have found that CSR is a means to strengthen legitimacy and to attract local talents, MNEs might run the risk involved in communicating about their CSR activities, which is stakeholders' skepticism. This CSR dilemma has been clearly depicted in studies of Bachmann and Ingenhoff (2016) and Du et al. (2010). On the one hand, stakeholders demand to know more about good acts of companies, but on the other hand they tend to become suspicious of the sincerity of the CSR motives when the companies extensively promote their CSR efforts. According to social psychologists, people have a tendency to care more about why others do things than about what they do (Donia, Ronen, Sirsly, & Bonaccio, 2019; Joo et al., 2016). Particularly, CSR can backfire if there is much situational skepticism (Forehand & Grier, 2003; Yoon et al., 2006). Attribution theory provides a suitable framework for a situation-based analysis of stakeholder skepticism. Based on attribution theory, when reading about the firm CSR initiatives, individuals would be likely to initially suspect the motives behind those initiatives and thus process the given information systematically to find out true motives of the firm. If they attribute the firm CSR activities to low sincere motives, it will result in higher skepticism, which in turn negatively influences subsequent attitudes and behaviors (Du et al., 2007; Forehand & Grier, 2003; Yoon et al., 2006). By extending these findings to the context of international recruitment, it is reasonable to infer that CSR perception can only lead to positive inferences about MNEs, and hence increasing organizational attractiveness when high sincere motives are attributed. Scholars have found evidence that stakeholders' previous perception of firms influences the motive attribution process of the firms' CSR (Du et al., 2010; Elving, 2013; Kim & Lee, 2012; Yoon et al., 2006). Elving (2013) explains that for firms with good reputation, people will not doubt the firms' motives. In fact, they may not even consider the firm's motives at all, which scales back the effects of sincere motive attribution. Meanwhile, for a firm with bad reputation, people will be more sensitive and engage more in the causal attribution, hence amplifying the effect of motive attribution. Especially, Vidaver-Cohen, Gomez, and Colwell (2015) document that country-of-origin affects reputation perception of MNEs. They have found that DMNEs from United States and Northern Europe received higher ratings on reputation than EMNEs from Latin America and Southern Europe. This is also in line with a review of corporate reputation by Mitra, Green, and Dutta (2013). These researchers find that EMNEs suffer bad corporate reputation from their country-of-origin, which are exemplified through broad lenses of deficiency in sociohistorical specificities, instability, corruption, outlandish culture customs, and strict authoritarianism. Referring to these findings,

we expect that CSR perception only increases EMNEs’ organizational attractiveness and weaken the negative relationship between emerging country-of-origin and job-pursuit intention when applicants attribute sincere motives. Our assumption is also strengthened by the paradox of double-edge legitimacy proposed by Ashforth and Gibbs (1990) such that publics are more skeptical of legitimation attempts of firms with lower perceived legitimacy. Unlike DMNEs, EMNEs suffer from double disadvantages of liabilities of foreignness plus liabilities of origin from a developing economy home base, resulting in lower legitimacy for EMNEs, as compared to DMNEs (Contractor, 2013; Held & Bader, 2018). Hence, if EMNEs try to engage in CSR to make up for their tarnished country-of-origin image and gain legitimacy, applicants may perceive their CSR efforts as insincere, which reduces the positive effect of CSR. We, therefore, propose that:

*Hypothesis 4: The moderating effect of CSR perception on the negative relationship between emerging country-of-origin and job-pursuit intention is stronger when sincere motive attribution is high.*

**Figure 3.1. Conceptual model**



### 3.4. Methodology

#### 3.4.1. Experimental Design

Our study is based on a 2 (country of origin: 5 developed vs. 5 emerging) x 3 (CSR: good vs. mediocre vs. poor) between-subjects experimental design. We used several developed and several emerging markets as stimuli to reduce any idiosyncratic country image influence beyond the distinction in developed vs. emerging. For this, we identified 5 emerging and 5 developed countries that were, in the context of recruitment, homogeneous within and heterogeneous between. Thirty fictitious corporation career webpages were created. Following the approach of Hong and Kim (2017), we selected a fictitious foreign medium-sized consumer goods manufacturer to preclude any potential emotional ties of respondents with an existing company. Moreover, when respondents are unfamiliar with the company, they will rely more

on the available signals from country-of-origin or CSR in their decision-making process (Han, 1989). The reason for selecting consumer goods sector is that it is highly visible to people and accounts for 35% of material inputs used globally and 75% of municipal solid waste, which has a high polluting potential and is subject to high pressure and scrutiny from stakeholders (EMF, 2013; González-Benito & González-Benito, 2006). To enhance the external validity, the construction of the webpage is based on career pages of real companies. We selected Mars, Inc. and SC Johnson as examples because they are consumer goods manufacturers that appeared in the list of the World's 20 Best Workplace 2018 – Multinational (Great-Place-to-Work, 2018) and both have international operations in Switzerland, Germany, and Austria. The job opportunities offered are junior manager positions. The logic behind this is that the junior management level is attractive to our participants, and thus motivate them to navigate throughout the webpage. Each webpage was available in both English and German. Screenshots of the webpages are provided in Appendix 3.1.

For recognition of country-of-origin and CSR, all webpages included information on the country-of-origin and CSR initiatives. CSR activities, based on Kinder, Lydenberg, Domini (KLD) ratings, consist of 11 dimensions. Of these dimensions, the five dimensions environment, community relations, diversity, product issues, and employee relations are more important than the others and have been widely used in prior research. Especially, Backhaus et al. (2002) find that these five have the largest effects on firm attractiveness as an employer. The good CSR condition described what firms are currently doing or have done with concrete indicators, such as resource allocation and actual impacts related to each of the five CSR dimensions. The mediocre CSR condition only showed statements and intentions that do not necessarily translate into real actions. In the poor CSR condition, we mentioned some but not all the five CSR dimensions with only a few superficial sentences. Four business lecturers from two universities carefully reviewed the three scenarios and agreed that they adequately portrayed different levels.

### **3.4.2. Pretest for Country Image**

To identify five homogeneous emerging and five homogeneous developed countries in the context of recruitment, a pretest was conducted on the respondent perception of countries/territories, starting with a list of 10 developed and 10 emerging markets. The selection of countries/territories is based on the latest Human Development Index (HDI) of the United Nations (UNDP, 2019). The developed group contains the ten highest ranking countries/territories with regard to HDI, excluding Switzerland (2<sup>nd</sup>) and Germany (4<sup>th</sup>) because the study respondents are from these two countries. Thus, the ten countries/territories are Norway, Australia, Hong Kong, Sweden, Singapore, Netherlands, Denmark, Finland, Canada, and US. These selected countries/territories are classified as developed markets by FTSE (2019) and are among the top 25 of the World Competitiveness Ranking by World Economic Forum (Schwab, 2019). On the other hand, the emerging group consists of Asian emerging countries/territories in the range of middle and high index value. We chose to focus in this region as it is one of main drivers of the world economy according to IMF (Lagarde, 2016). They are China, Taiwan, India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, Thailand, and Bangladesh. These selected countries/territories represent a range in terms of the size of

population, economic development, religious affiliation, and political experience, which could be representative of Asian emerging markets.

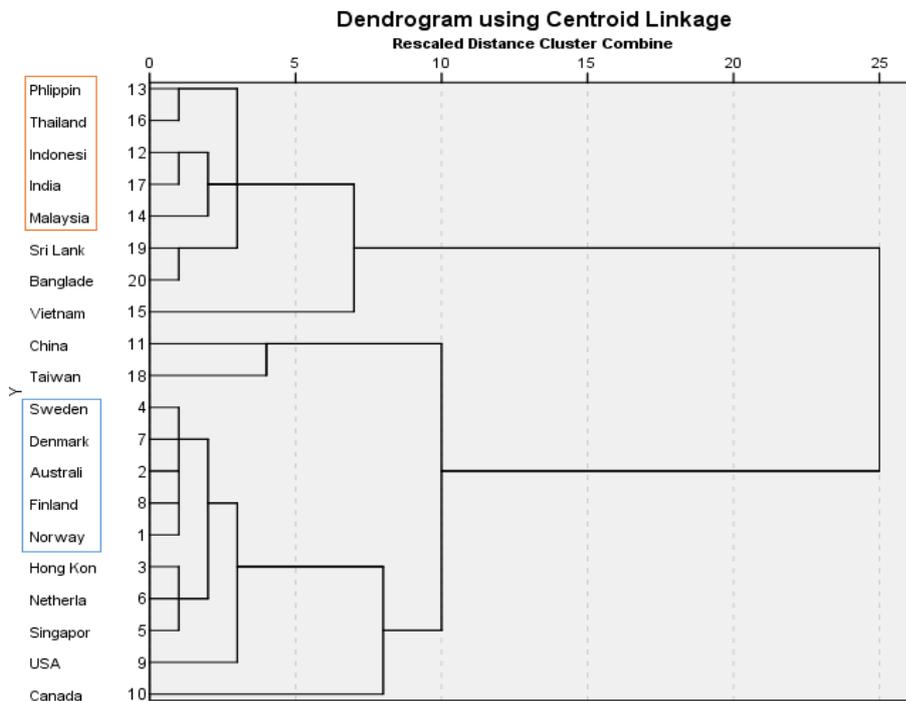
The purpose of the pretest was to find five markets in each group with high homogeneity within one group and significant heterogeneity across the two groups in the aspect of country-of-origin image in the context of recruitment. To do that we first needed to operationalize the concept of country-of-origin image which we did based on the three-dimensional construct of Froese et al. (2010) for the specific context of recruitment. We administered our pretest surveys to 76 participants, who were randomly assigned to one of the 5 questionnaire versions, each containing questions on four countries/territories (2 developed and 2 emerging). Through factor analysis of the seven items we obtained two factors (see Table 3.1). The first includes items representing the cognitive perception of technological development and general human resource practice of a country ( $\alpha = .879$ ). The second includes items representing the affective perception of in-group favoritism of people from a country ( $\alpha = .710$ ). From these two factors, the countries were segmented using the hierarchical cluster method, which is widely used in the literature for small samples (Janssens, De Pelsmacker, Wijnen, & Van Kenhove, 2008). Applying this method, the selection of two groups proved to be ideal, namely the developed country group: Sweden, Denmark, Australia, Finland, Norway and the emerging country group: Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, India, Malaysia (see dendrogram in Figure 3.2).

One interesting finding from our pretest is that China and Taiwan are categorized as a separate cluster from the other emerging markets and eventually even grouped with the developed markets. These two emerging markets are catching up with developed nations in terms of technological development and career prospects. Their competitive advantage is no longer predicated solely upon low-cost labor (Devang, Kruse, Parker, & Siren, 2017).

**Table 3.1. Factor analysis of country-of-origin image in the pretest**

	1	2
Working for a company from [Country name] provides good opportunities for career advancement.	<b>0.932</b>	0.054
Working for a company from [Country name] provides good training.	<b>0.895</b>	-0.034
[Country name] is a technologically and scientifically advanced country.	<b>0.860</b>	0.155
A job at a company from [Country name] would have a good working environment.	<b>0.740</b>	-0.291
[Country name] people discriminate against non-[Country name] people.	-0.037	<b>0.849</b>
[Country name] people are arrogant.	0.068	<b>0.767</b>
[Country name] people socialize only with their own people.	-0.069	<b>0.753</b>

Figure 3.2. Cluster analysis result in the pretest



### 3.4.3. Sample

Third-year bachelor and master students majoring in business at several universities in Germany, Switzerland and Austria are the main focus of the study because they will soon graduate, and graduates constitute a major part of the future qualified labor force for MNEs operating in these countries. The sample exclusively consists of German, Swiss and Austrian citizens to eliminate any potential different perceptions caused by other nationalities. Since these three countries are German-speaking countries, the questionnaire was translated into German. To ensure the reliability, all items were translated from English into German by a bilingual researcher and back-translated into English by another bilingual researcher (Mullen, 1995). 589 students took part in the study voluntarily, and 257 completed it. We also recruited additional 318 participants via a crowdsourcing platform. Researchers have considered crowdsourcing platforms a useful and cost-effective source of data for research in the behavioral sciences (Goodman, Cryder, & Cheema, 2013; Simcox & Fiez, 2014). There is growing prevalence of crowdsourcing literature: more than 40% of the studies published in the Journal of Consumer Research issue 42 used crowdsourcing platforms for data collection (Goodman & Paolacci, 2017; Mellis & Bickel, 2020). We implemented one validity-check question and time limit options in the survey to control for the quality of the responses collected via the platform, consistent with the best practices suggested by Cobanoglu, Cavusoglu, and Turkatarhan (2021). The demographic information of these participants is shown in Table 3.2. We compared the two sample groups using Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests and the results show that they are comparable in all demographic characteristics ( $p > .05$ ), except for age. The crowdsourcing sample was younger than our original university sample. Nevertheless, our target group aged between 20 and 30 remained dominant in both samples. We compared the responses of the two groups further by conducting t-tests on the key variables. The results show

that for none of our key variables, the two groups display a significant difference (CSR perception:  $M_{\text{university}} = 4.49$ ,  $M_{\text{crowdsourcing}} = 4.70$ ,  $t(326) = -1.64$ ,  $p > .05$ ; sincere motive attribution:  $M_{\text{university}} = 4.57$ ,  $M_{\text{crowdsourcing}} = 4.82$ ,  $t(326) = -1.88$ ,  $p > .05$ ; job-pursuit intention:  $M_{\text{university}} = 4.49$ ,  $M_{\text{crowdsourcing}} = 4.78$ ,  $t(326) = -1.88$ ,  $p > .05$ ).

From those 575, we excluded 85 participants who spent a very short time on the company webpages. Our final sample consists of 490 participants (282 German, 111 Swiss, and 97 Austrian). Their average age was 24.24 years ( $SD = 3.86$ ), and 34% were actually looking for a job. We further excluded 162 participants from the hypotheses tests related to CSR who did not open the sub-page “Sustainability” as these participants were not exposed to our CSR manipulations. We used Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests to statistically test whether those remaining form a good representation of the total set. The results indicate that both the final and reduced samples are comparable to the total sample for all control demographic variables ( $p > .05$ ).

**Table 3.2. Sample characteristics**

	Reduced set n = 328	Final sample n = 490	Total sample n = 575	Crowdsourcing sample n = 318	University sample n = 257
Gender					
▪ Male	46%	47.9%	49%	54.1%	42.6%
▪ Female	54%	52.1%	51%	45.9%	57.4%
Age					
▪ Less than 20	7.9%	6.9%	7%	7.5%	6.2%
▪ 20-30	86.9%	88%	88%	91.6%	83.7%
▪ Over 30	5.2%	5.1%	5%	.9%	10.1%
Education					
▪ Less than Bachelor’s degree	58.5%	54.7%	53.7%	56.3%	50.6%
▪ Bachelor’s degree	32%	34.9%	35.3%	34%	37%
▪ Master’s degree	8.6%	9.8%	10.3%	9.4%	11.3%
▪ Doctorate	.9%	.6%	.7%	0.3%	1.1%
Country experience					
▪ Yes	84.5%	15.9%	16.7%	17.6%	15.6%
▪ No	15.5%	84.1%	83.3%	82.4%	84.4%
EMNE work experience					
▪ Yes	6.4%	5.9%	7.3%	7.2%	7.4%
▪ No	93.6%	94.1%	92.7%	92.8%	92.6%
EMNE visit experience					
▪ Yes	11.3%	12%	13.2%	12.3%	14.4%
▪ No	88.7%	88%	86.8%	87.7%	85.6%

### 3.4.4. Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to one of 30 scenarios. At first, participants were asked to imagine themselves as applicants who had found a MNE that was currently recruiting junior managers. Then, they were asked to click on the link of the career page of that MNE to get more information. On the career page, we provided the same brief description of the company, open positions offered, salary level and compensation package obtained from real recruitment advertisements, in order to eliminate any potential effects of extraneous factors on

job-pursuit intention. Then, participants could further access an “About us” section giving in each scenario the same description of the MNE as a global player, except for the country-of-origin. There was also a “Sustainability” section revealing different CSR activities depending on specific scenarios. Afterwards, participants answered questions on manipulation checks, their attraction to the organization, motive attribution, personal traits, the relative importance of five CSR dimensions in their job-choice process, and demographic characteristics.

### **3.4.5. Measures**

#### *Willingness to search for CSR information*

This variable was measured by whether a respondent opened the sub-page “Sustainability” from the MNE’s career page using Google Analytics and User Activity Tracking plugin. With these tools, we can also explore viewing time, page-view order, and bounce rate (percentage of all sessions in which users view only a single page then exit without opening others).

#### *CSR perception ( $\alpha = .74$ )*

Following (Joo et al., 2016), four items were developed to reflect respondents’ perceptions of the MNE’s CSR activities: “This company has placed significant efforts to improve energy efficiency in its daily operation,” “This company implements programs to improve its products for the well-being of its customers,” “This company offers training to its employees and establishes measures to actively support employment and fair treatment toward women and minority employees,” and “This company made donations to improve the well-being of society.”

#### *Sincere motive attribution ( $\alpha = .89$ )*

We used three items adapted from Du et al. (2007); Yoon et al. (2006). A sample item is “This company has genuine concerns for the environment, customers, employees, and community.”

#### *Job-pursuit intention ( $\alpha = .90$ )*

We employed Highhouse, Lievens, and Sinar (2003)’s measure of job-pursuit intention. A sample item is “I would make this company one of my first choices as an employer.”

All the above-mentioned constructs were measured using a 7-point Likert scale anchored from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) for a coherent structure throughout the survey.

### **3.4.6. Manipulation Checks**

Manipulation checks for web page realism, participant engagement and their perceptions of the MNE’s country-of-origin and CSR activities were carried out to ensure the validity of the experiment. Following Jones et al. (2014), we check whether participants perceived the web page to be realistic by one item: “The information from the company’s web page looked like it was from the real web page” ( $M = 5.26$ ,  $SD = 1.40$ ) and whether they engaged in their roles as applicants by two items: “I really tried to imagine that I was looking for a job” ( $M = 5.84$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ) and “If I were actually looking for a job, I’d like to read information from company websites like I did in this study” ( $M = 5.85$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ). Respondents

perceived the website to be realistic and were engaged in the applicant role as the mean values on a 7-point agreement scale all exceed 5.25.

Then, participants were asked to assess the MNE's country-of-origin as well as its CSR activities. The t-tests results show that the developed country group was perceived to have higher technological development and better general human resource practice than emerging country group ( $M_{\text{developed}} = 5.42$ ,  $M_{\text{emerging}} = 4.10$ ,  $t(488) = 15.39$ ,  $p < .001$ ), whereas there is no significant difference in the perception of in-group favoritism of people from developed country and emerging country groups ( $M_{\text{developed}} = 2.14$ ,  $M_{\text{emerging}} = 2.17$ ,  $t(488) = .34$ ,  $p > .05$ ).

Regarding CSR perception, a one-way ANOVA showed that values are significantly different in the good, mediocre, and poor CSR conditions ( $M_{\text{good}} = 5.27$ ,  $M_{\text{mediocre}} = 4.48$ ,  $M_{\text{poor}} = 3.91$ ,  $F(2, 325) = 32.02$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .17$ ). Results of post hoc tests indicated that participants who were assigned to the good CSR manipulation had higher CSR perception than those assigned to the mediocre CSR condition (95% CI [.46, 1.11],  $p < .001$ ) and to the poor condition (95% CI [1.01, 1.71],  $p < .001$ ). In addition, participants in the mediocre CSR condition had higher CSR perception than those in the poor CSR condition (95% CI [.23, .93],  $p < .001$ ). In addition, we ran one-way ANOVA separately for DMNEs and EMNEs and found that those significant differences across the three CSR conditions remained for both DMNEs and EMNEs.

Overall, these results show that the manipulations worked as intended and created significant variance in the independent variables.

### **3.4.7. Control Variables**

To exclude confounding effects of demographic variables as in prior studies assessing job-pursuit intention, we controlled for respondent age, gender, education level, working experience, country experience, EMNE experience, trait-based skepticism, need for cognition, and global identity.

## **3.5. Results**

### **3.5.1. Measurement Equivalence**

Since we collected cross-national data, our measures need to exhibit an adequate equivalence across cultures. Following the procedures recommended by Vandenberg and Lance (2000), we conducted multigroup confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) for each of our measures across the three culture groups using AMOS 26. Each measure was examined separately because separating CFA tests helps reduce the likelihood that extraneous covariances cloud the understanding of individual item functioning (Rupp et al., 2018). Table 3.3 presents the model fit indices from these CFA tests. As can be seen from these results, the model assessing metric invariance fits the data well relative to the model assessing configural invariance (insignificant chi-square differences), which supports measurement equivalence in our study. Thus, the pooling of the three national samples for subsequent hypothesis testing is justified.

**Table 3.3. Measurement equivalence tests for study variables**

Variables	$\chi^2$	<i>df</i>	CFI	GFI	RMSEA	$\Delta\chi^2$	$\Delta df$	<i>p</i>
Job-pursuit intention								
Configural invariance	56.78	15	.97	.95	.08	10.14	8	<i>p</i> > .05
Metric invariance	66.92	23	.97	.95	.06			
Country image								
Cognitive								
Configural invariance	10.59	6	.99	.99	.03	6.67	6	<i>p</i> > .05
Metric invariance	17.26	12	.99	.99	.03			
Affective								
Configural invariance	0.00	0	1.00	1.00		6.06	4	<i>p</i> > .05
Metric invariance	6.06	4	1.00	.99	.03			
CSR perception								
Configural invariance	22.27	6	.97	.98	.07	6.47	6	<i>p</i> > .05
Metric invariance	28.74	12	.97	.98	.05			
Sincere motive attribution								
Configural invariance	0.00	0	1.00	1.00		9.34	4	<i>p</i> > .05
Metric invariance	9.34	4	.99	.99	.06			
Trait-based skepticism								
Configural invariance	0.00	0	1.00	1.00		2.49	4	<i>p</i> > .05
Metric invariance	2.49	4	1.00	1.00	.00			
Need for cognition								
Configural invariance	0.00	0	1.00	1.00		3.72	4	<i>p</i> > .05
Metric invariance	3.72	4	1.00	1.00	.00			
Global identity								
Configural invariance	11.80	6	.99	.99	.04	6.13	6	<i>p</i> > .05
Metric invariance	17.93	12	.99	.99	.03			

Note: CFI = comparative fit index; GFI = goodness of fit index; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation

### 3.5.2. Common-Method Variance

Common-method variance (CMV), which is defined in terms of variance attributable to the measurement method rather than to constructs of interest, poses a serious threat for bias in social science research, particularly with a single time and single source survey (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012). Since our study is based on a single time survey in which both independent and dependent variables were collected from the same respondents with similar response scales, we need to control for the presence of CMV and examine whether it caused any systematic error. Nevertheless, it should be noted that in an ongoing debate on the problems with CMV, a recent study of Fuller, Simmering, Atinc, Atinc, and Babin (2016) has empirically proved that CMV can bias results *only* when CMV is present at a relatively high level (approaching 70% or more) and that these cases are indeed not common in practice.

Following Podsakoff et al. (2012), we controlled for the bias by both ex-ante procedures in the questionnaire design and ex-post statistical checks. Some ex-ante procedural remedies applied were assuring respondent anonymity and confidentiality, emphasizing that there were no right or wrong answers to reduce evaluation apprehension, improving item wording to avoid ambiguity, and varying order of items. We also addressed ex-post statistical remedies using Harman's single-factor test. Although one may question the reliability of this test, Fuller et al. (2016) have demonstrated that criticisms of the Harman test's reliability are partially

unfounded. Specifically, they found that false negatives (i.e., the Harman test indicates no common-method bias when the bias is present) are much less common than false positives (i.e., the test indicates bias from CMV when none is evident in data). The false positives may occur in high-reliability datasets with Cronbach's  $\alpha$  higher than 0.95, which is not the case in our study. The Harman test's unrotated factor solution revealed that a seven-factor model explained 66.47% of the total variance and no single factor accounted for more than 50% of the variance (the highest was 27.63%). Since no single factor emerged to account for the majority of covariance among variables, it appears that CMV is not a major concern. We also applied a CFA approach to Harman's one-factor analysis and compared the one-factor Harman's confirmatory factor analysis solution to the seven-factor solution. We found that the single-factor solution did not fit the data well ( $\chi^2_{(324)} = 3124.42, p < .01, CFI = .63, TLI = .59, RMSEA = .13$ ) and was indeed significantly worse than the seven-factor solution ( $\Delta\chi^2_{(21)} = 2605.31, p < .01$ ). To gauge the extent of CMV, we additionally included an unmeasured common latent factor in CFA. This common latent factor did not account for substantial variance in the indicator variables (only 2.25%). Furthermore, we found no changes in the path directions and significances between the constrained (factor loadings are constrained to zero) and unconstrained (factor loadings are estimated freely) models, implying that a single method-driven factor did not represent our data (Lowry, Gaskin, Twyman, Hammer, & Roberts, 2013). Overall, these statistical tests provide adequate support that CMV does not pose a significant threat to this study.

### **3.5.3. Preliminary Checks**

As a preliminary check of our basic premise, we investigated the relative importance of CSR dimensions to Swiss, German, and Austrian applicants in their job-choice process. As expected, we found that applicants considered all five CSR dimensions important ( $M = 5.62, SD = .86$ ). Overall, applicants consider CSR dimension of employee relations the most important (71% males and 82% females rated this dimension as very important/important, 6-7 rating on the 7-point scale), followed by product issues and environment. The least important is the dimension of community relations. Females place more importance on all five CSR dimensions than males, and in particular on the diversity dimension (72% females versus 38% males rated diversity important).

In line with our research objective to address applicants' awareness of firm CSR activity, we investigated their behaviours on the corporate webpage. In general, page-view order is the same as the page order in the navigation menu. Consequently, when the "Sustainability" page was located at the bottom of the navigation menu, it reduces the probability of being viewed for that page. We did not find a large difference in website viewing time between DMNEs and EMNEs (134 versus 132 seconds). However, as expected, the bounce rate of DMNEs' websites (20%) was higher than that of EMNEs' websites (14%), which shows that applicants were more motivated to process further information about EMNEs. We will return to this in the next section.

**Table 3.4. Correlation matrix**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Age	--													
2. Gender	-.139*	--												
3. Education	.390**	.020	--											
4. Working experience	.642**	-.094	.116*	--										
5. EMNE work experience	.172**	.042	.260**	.257**	--									
6. EMNE visit experience	.048	.039	.189**	.133*	.497**	--								
7. Country experience	.101	.160**	.134*	.108*	.128*	.113*	--							
8. Trait-based skepticism	.080	-.078	-.002	.023	.014	-.035	-.022	--						
9. Need for cognition	-.021	.053	.124*	-.020	-.040	.031	.099	-.023	--					
10. Global identity	.000	.142*	-.055	.036	.034	.099	.003	-.099	.187**	--				
11. Country-of-origin	-.005	-.056	.010	-.016	-.012	.016	-.251**	.018	-.010	-.034	--			
12. CSR perception	-.041	.133*	-.070	-.007	-.152**	-.082	-.028	-.189**	-.024	.092	-.045	--		
13. Sincere motive attribution	-.101	.142*	-.133*	-.077	-.127*	-.108	-.049	-.266**	-.028	.175**	-.143**	.592**	--	
14. Job-pursuit intention	.020	.146**	-.050	-.029	-.049	.012	.054	-.226**	-.033	.232**	-.248**	.415**	.573**	--

Note: N = 328. Gender was coded as 0 = male, 1 = female; Educational level was coded as 0 = less than Bachelor's degree, 1 = at least Bachelor's degree; EMNE work experience/EMNE visit experience/Country experience were coded as 0 = no, 1 = yes; Country-of-origin was coded as 0 = developed, 1 = emerging.

<sup>+</sup> $p < .10$ . \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Table 3.5. Regression results: Hierarchical moderated regression analyses of job-pursuit intention**

Variables	Step 1			Step 2			Step 3			Step 4		
	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$
	3.49	.55		3.71	.46		3.75	.46		3.76	.46	
Age	.05	.02	.14	.05	.02	<b>.15*</b>	.05	.02	<b>.14*</b>	.04	.02	<b>.14*</b>
Gender	.28	.14	<b>.11*</b>	.11	.12	.04	.08	.11	.03	.08	.12	.03
Education	-.17	.16	-.06	-.06	.13	-.02	-.05	.13	-.02	-.04	.13	-.02
Working experience	-.05	.04	-.10	-.05	.03	-.10	-.04	.03	-.09	-.04	.03	-.08
EMNE work experience	-.31	.32	-.06	-.09	.27	-.02	-.10	.27	-.02	-.09	.27	-.02
EMNE visit experience	.10	.24	.02	.28	.20	.07	.29	.20	.07	.29	.20	.07
Country experience	.19	.19	.06	.10	.16	.03	.15	.16	.04	.14	.16	.04
Trait-based skepticism	-.21	.06	<b>-.20***</b>	-.08	.05	-.07	-.07	.05	-.07	-.07	.05	-.07
Need for cognition	-.16	.06	<b>-.14**</b>	-.10	.05	<b>-.09*</b>	-.10	.05	<b>-.10*</b>	-.11	.05	<b>-.10*</b>
Global identity	.25	.06	<b>.22***</b>	.16	.05	<b>.14**</b>	.17	.05	<b>.15**</b>	.17	.05	<b>.15**</b>
Country-of-origin (Emerging Market)				-.43	.11	<b>-.17***</b>	-.44	.11	<b>-.17***</b>	-.38	.13	<b>-.15**</b>
CSR perception				.13	.06	<b>.12*</b>	-.04	.09	-.04	-.07	.09	-.06
Sincere motive attribution				.43	.06	<b>.43***</b>	.49	.09	<b>.49***</b>	.52	.09	<b>.51***</b>
Country-of-origin x CSR							.32	.12	<b>.22**</b>	.34	.12	<b>.23**</b>
Country-of-origin x sincere motive attribution							-.10	.11	-.08	-.13	.12	-.10
CSR x sincere motive attribution							-.01	.03	-.01	.03	.05	.05
Country-of-origin x CSR x sincere motive attribution										-.07	.07	-.08
F	5.29***			17.07***			14.72***			13.91***		
R <sup>2</sup>	.14			.41			.43			.43		
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.12			.39			.40			.40		
$\Delta R^2$				.27***			.02*			.00		

Note: N = 328. Gender was coded as 0 = male, 1 = female; Educational level was coded as 0 = less than Bachelor's degree, 1 = at least Bachelor's degree; EMNE work experience/EMNE visit experience/Country experience were coded as 0 = no, 1 = yes; Country-of-origin was coded as 0 = developed, 1 = emerging.

+ $p < .10$ . \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

### 3.5.4. Hypotheses Tests

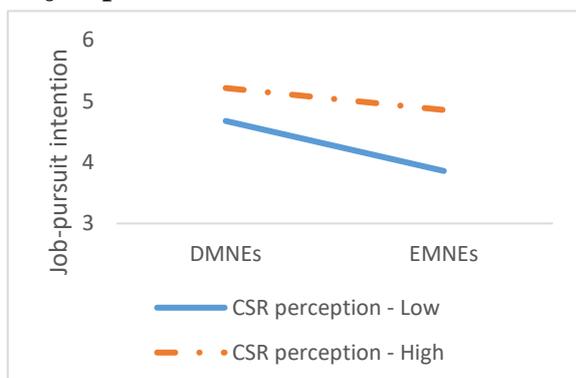
Table 3.4 presents the correlation matrix. Consistent with our expectations, job-pursuit intention negatively correlated with emerging country-of-origin and positively correlated with CSR perception.

To test our hypotheses, we conducted hierarchical moderated regression. We centered all continuous predictor variables before entering them into the regression equation and generating the interaction terms, following the approach of Aguinis (2004) and Rupp et al. (2018). We first entered all control variables (i.e., respondent age, gender, education level, working experience, country experience, EMNE experience, trait-based skepticism, need for cognition, and global identity) into the regression equation. In the second and third steps, we entered the main effects of country-of-origin, CSR perceptions, sincere motive attribution, and the two-way interactions among them, respectively. In the last step, we entered the three-way interaction of country-of-origin, CSR perceptions, and sincere motive attribution. The results (see Table 3.5) revealed that originating from emerging markets reduces job-pursuit intention ( $\beta = -.15, p < .01$ ). The t-test results converged with our regression analyses: job-pursuit intention ( $M_{\text{developed}} = 4.96, M_{\text{emerging}} = 4.33, t(326) = 4.69, p < .001$ ). Thus, Hypothesis 1 is supported.

Tracking applicants’ behaviours on the corporate webpage, we found that they were more willing to search for CSR information for EMNEs than for DMNEs, supporting Hypothesis 2. Specifically, the percentages of applicants that clicked open the sub-page “Sustainability” for EMNEs and DMNEs were 73.66% and 60.32% ( $\chi^2 = 9.85, df = 1, p < .01$ ), respectively.

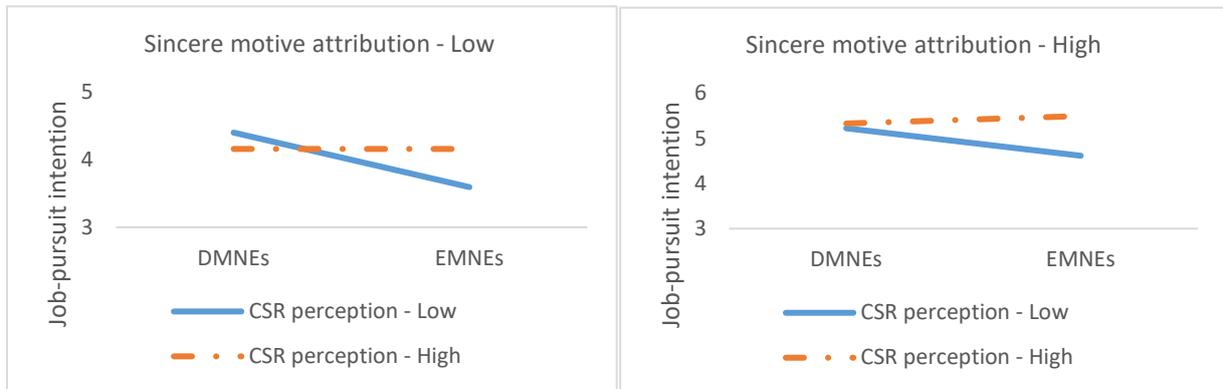
The two-way interaction between emerging country-of-origin and applicants’ CSR perception on job-pursuit intention was significant ( $\beta = .23, p < .01$ ). Figure 3.3 presents the two-way interaction. Simple slopes analyses and slope difference test revealed that CSR perception diminished the negative relationship between emerging country-of-origin and job-pursuit intention such that the relationship was weaker when CSR perception was high ( $B = -.27, p > .05$ ) versus low ( $B = -.91, p < .001$ ; slope difference = .64,  $t = 2.61, p < .01$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis 3 is supported.

**Figure 3.3. Two-way interaction between country-of-origin and CSR perception on job-pursuit intention**



Although emerging country-of-origin is negatively related to sincere motive attribution as expected ( $correlation = -.14, p < .01$ ), we did not find a significant three-way interaction of country-of-origin, CSR perception, and sincere motive attribution on job-pursuit intention ( $\beta = -.08, p > .1$ ). Consequently, Hypothesis 4 is not supported. The effect of CSR perception surpassed our expectation. High level of perceived CSR increases job-pursuit intention for EMNEs, which weakens the negative effect associated with emerging country-of-origin regardless of motive attribution (see Figure 3.4). Despite the insignificant three-way interaction, sincere motive attribution still plays a direct role in influencing applicants' job-pursuit intention ( $\beta = .51, p < .001$ ).

**Figure 3.4. Three-way interaction of country-of-origin, CSR perception, and sincere motive attribution on job-pursuit intention**



### 3.5.5. Supplementary Analysis

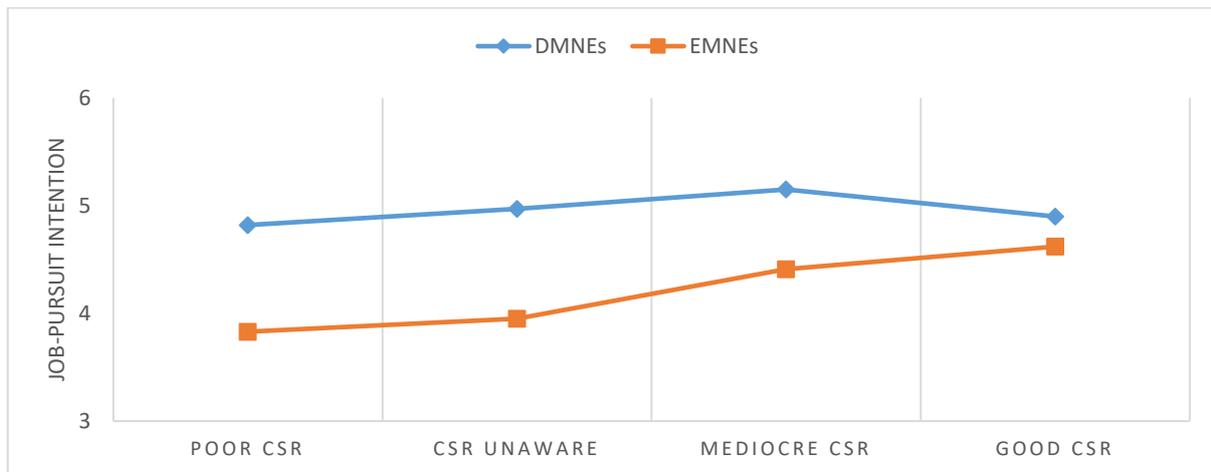
We conducted ANOVA to evaluate the differences in job-pursuit intention between CSR aware group (those who opened the sub-page “Sustainability”) and CSR unaware group (those who did not) with separation between EMNEs and DMNEs (see Table 3.6 and Figure 3.5). The results indicated that for EMNEs, job-pursuit intention was significantly higher when applicants were aware of the company’s good CSR as compared to when they were aware of the company’s poor CSR and when they were unaware of the company’s CSR activities. On the other hand, the results for DMNEs showed no significant differences in applicants’ job-pursuit intention toward DMNEs whether they were unaware or aware of the company’s CSR (either good, mediocre or poor).

**Table 3.6. Mean comparison of job-pursuit intention: results of ANOVA**

	Mean				<i>F value</i>	<i>Post-hoc test (Mean difference)</i>					
	CSR Unaware	CSR Aware				CSR unaware vs. Poor CSR aware	CSR unaware vs. Mediocre CSR aware	CSR unaware vs. Good CSR aware	Poor vs. Mediocre CSR aware	Poor vs. Good CSR aware	Good vs. Mediocre CSR aware
		Poor	Mediocre	Good							
<i>DMNEs</i> , n = 247	4.97	4.82	5.15	4.90	.87	.15	-.18	.07	-.33	-.08	-.25
<i>EMNEs</i> , n = 243	3.95	3.83	4.41	4.62	<b>5.38**</b>	.12	-.46	<b>-.67*</b>	-.58 <sup>+</sup>	<b>-.79**</b>	.21

<sup>+</sup>*p* < .10. \**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01. \*\*\**p* < .001.

Figure 3.5. Effects of country-of-origin and CSR activities on job-pursuit intention



### 3.6. Discussion

#### 3.6.1. General Discussion

In general, our findings indicate that the less favorable country-of-origin image of EMNEs in terms of career-enhancing job characteristics and technological development results in lower job-pursuit intention for EMNEs as compared to DMNEs. This confirms the expected liability of emergingness in international human resource management. It also substantiates previous findings (Held & Bader, 2018; Hong & Kim, 2017) that country-of-origin image presents an enormous challenge for EMNEs in attracting local talent in developed markets. The liability of emergingness is also confirmed by the finding that applicants are more skeptical about the sincerity of EMNEs' CSR motives. Nevertheless, the mean differences are smaller than expected, suggesting that EMNEs are catching up with DMNEs in terms of attractiveness as potential employers in developed markets. There is also evidence in our pretest for the advancing of EMNEs: two emerging countries, China and Taiwan, were categorized in the same cluster as the developed countries.

Through the application of signaling and attribution theory, we argue that CSR helps mitigate the negative effect of originating from emerging countries on hiring talent in developed host countries. High levels of perceived CSR increase job-pursuit intention for EMNE even when applicants attribute low sincere motive to the firm's CSR engagement. It could be explained that CSR is associated with great value to compensate for the prevalent institutional voids in home countries of EMNEs. Even if applicants consider the firm's engagement as insincere, such engagement still benefits them and ensures a good employment opportunity. Unlike EMNEs, CSR is less influential for DMNEs. The less relevance of CSR for DMNEs was also shown by lower willingness to search for CSR information. In other words, CSR strategies can be an important factor influencing MNEs' recruitment, particularly when the company's country image is poor, in line with Mazboudi et al. (2020) and Hong and Kim (2017). Yet, one might question whether other traditional HR factors (i.e., salary) should be the central differentiator for EMNEs in attracting talent. Our results, of course, did not intend to undermine the importance of salary. However, we believe that for EMNEs, CSR stands a better chance of escaping the stereotypes of their own country-of-origin and staying competitive with

DMNEs in the war for talent. Specifically, based on image and signaling theory, an applicant's process of employer choice consists of two processes: (1) a screening process in which applicants absorb signals about different potential future employers and eliminate those that are not compatible with their values and principles from the pool of potential employers; (2) a choosing process in which applicants continue to examine the options left from the screening process and choose to pursue job with the one offering the highest profitability to achieve their goals (Beach, 1993; Held & Bader, 2018; Spence, 1973). Therefore, it is imperative for EMNEs to firstly pass the compatibility test. Indeed, CSR has been found to enhance person-organization fit (Gully, Phillips, Castellano, Han, & Kim, 2013; Kim & Park, 2011; Zhang & Gowan, 2012). Aiman-Smith, Bauer, and Cable (2001), moreover, have empirically shown that CSR (not salary) most strongly influenced the applicants' attraction to an organization.

Further, although the three-way interaction between country-of-origin, CSR perception, and sincere motive attribution is insignificant, there is a significant positive direct relationship between sincere motive attribution and job-pursuit intention. It is evident, therefore, that sincere motive attribution still plays an important role in influencing applicants' job-pursuit intention. Applicants do not only care about what the companies do, but also why they do, hence the importance of considering applicants' skepticism.

We would also like to draw attention to unexpected findings about DMNEs. Firstly, when applicants attributed low sincere motive to the firm's CSR engagement, high levels of CSR perception reduced applicants' job-pursuit intention for DMNEs. Secondly, the mean values of job-pursuit intention were lower when applicants were aware of DMNEs' good CSR as compared to when they were unaware of the company's CSR (despite insignificant mean differences). One explanation for that could be that applicants may have higher expectations for DMNEs. By studying the complexity of strategic CSR and corporate brand, Polonsky and Jevons (2009) indicate that MNEs, especially those from developed countries, need to address the highest set of global expectations since any lower level will be criticized for being less than appropriate. In our three CSR scenarios, only the good condition showed specific quantitative and monetary indicators demonstrating the firm's actual impacts. Even though the provided figures are good, they might not meet the respondents' expectations, particularly when they were not taken from companies with the best CSR reputation. This expectation is a reference point for evaluation (Cadotte, Woodruff, & Jenkins, 1987; Han, 2015): when the firm's CSR performance is lower than the expected level, information on CSR efforts backfire and the firm is evaluated negatively.

We emphasize the importance of applicants' willingness to search for CSR information. Even though the CSR information is available on the corporate webpage, 33.13% of the potential applicants did not view it. Still, that means that two thirds of potential applicants search for such information. As a robustness check, we also calculated these percentages for only those respondents who were currently looking for a job and the results remain the same, supporting the validity of our finding. Moreover, excluding those that only viewed the first page and exited, we investigated those who opened other sub-pages, e.g. "About us", but not the CSR sub-page. Interestingly, although they rated corporate social performance important ( $M = 5.39$ ,  $SD = .91$ ), they did not proactively seek CSR information, confirming previous findings

of low public's awareness of companies' CSR activities. This is a serious impediment in firms' attempts to maximize benefits from CSR engagement. It should be noted that the large percentage of applicants who did not look for CSR information could not undermine the importance of CSR as not looking does not necessarily equal not caring. As mentioned earlier, CSR is at the forefront on the global corporate agenda in today's socially conscious market environment and there is convincing evidence of the importance of CSR from both academic research and marketplace polls. Our findings provide further evidence to support the importance of CSR. Specifically, CSR does matter and it is more a challenge for companies to make sure that the applicants really become aware of their CSR activities.

### **3.6.2. Theoretical and Methodological Contributions**

EMNEs' applicant attraction in developed markets is an important yet under-researched area. This study investigates the effects of macro-level country-of-origin, firm-level CSR engagement and micro-level individual skepticism on job-pursuit intention for MNEs from five developed markets and five emerging markets, operating in Switzerland, Germany, and Austria. In doing so, our study, firstly, contributes to literature on the liability of emergingness (Held & Bader, 2018; Held & Berg, 2015), and aligns it with international human resource management, bringing both fields forward. Secondly, the study enriches CSR research on employee recruitment by adding a macro perspective (Maon et al., 2019), namely country-of-origin. Previous studies have mainly focused on individual-level variables (e.g., moral identity or personal relevance of CSR or socio-environmental consciousness) as contingency factors to explain the influence of CSR (Gond et al., 2017). Jones, Newman, Shao, and Cooke (2019), nevertheless, have underlined that despite the fact that the vast majority of extant individual-focused CSR research is micro in nature, "the scientific study of these phenomena is by no means restricted to the individual level" (p. 302). Our study reflects this reality that including more meso- and macro-level factors represents a proposed avenue for future individual-focused CSR research. Thirdly, by integrating signaling theory with attribution theory, our study depicts a more complete picture regarding how different CSR perceptions impact applicants' evaluations towards EMNEs and DMNEs (Gond et al., 2017). Fourthly, our study contributes to the advancement of knowledge about individual-level outcomes of CSR by examining the influences of individual traits, particularly skepticism (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). Finally, by using the behavioral experiment method and leveraging the power of digital technology, we offer the CSR community a new measure to assess applicants' awareness of companies' CSR activities. While CSR can only exert an impact if applicants are aware of it, little attention has been given to this issue.

### **3.6.3. Managerial Implications**

Our findings provide several managerial implications. We found that job-pursuit intention was significantly increased when applicants were aware of EMNEs' good CSR. Therefore, we advise managers of EMNEs to get more engaged in good CSR with tangible and measurable impacts to overcome the less favorable country-of-origin image in hiring local talent in more developed countries. No significant difference in job-pursuit intention between mediocre CSR aware group and CSR unaware group clearly shows that it would not be beneficial for EMNEs if they only use 'talk' strategy without showing concrete indicators of

impacts, especially when applicants tend to be more skeptical about EMNEs' CSR. Moreover, capturing the widespread CSR claims, stakeholders are becoming more skeptical. There are also an increasing number of CSR rating agencies, watchdog groups, indices, websites dedicating to identify greenwashing (e.g., by Corpwatch, Greenpeace) as well as consumer education schemes in the form of magazines and blogs that help people monitor firms' CSR performances (Pope & Wraas, 2016). If EMNEs try to take a short cut by communicating about their CSR without real actions or impacts, they will most likely not succeed.

Our findings are also important for foreign DMNEs. Particularly, the perception of country-of-origin image is crucial to DMNEs. Thus, DMNEs should emphasize their positive country-of-origin image in international recruitment. However, they should not underestimate their rival EMNEs in the war for talent. Although country-of-origin image signaling is proved to be more favorable for DMNEs and applicants are more attracted to DMNEs than to EMNEs, the gap is smaller than expected. According to several authors, it is just a matter of time when EMNEs catch up with DMNEs (Awate, Larsen, & Mudambi, 2015; Held & Bader, 2018). Besides, it should be noted that our findings do not imply that DMNEs should not engage in CSR activities. In contrast, we recommend that DMNEs should be diligent when develop their CSR strategy. Due to the complexity of strategic CSR and corporate brand, applicants may have higher expectations for DMNEs, so DMNEs need to address the highest set of global expectations. A violation of expectations could be seriously detrimental to DMNEs' attractiveness as a potential employer.

Both EMNEs and DMNEs should be mindful of applicants' skepticism as potential applicants may perceive the genuinity of CSR with skepticism, which will result in lower job-pursuit intention. Thus, companies should try to find a way to communicate their CSR activities that minimizes applicants' skepticism. Moreover, companies cannot yield any good returns to CSR if applicants are completely unaware of their CSR activities. Thus, both EMNEs and DMNEs should find ways to improve the low CSR awareness among applicants. One way to do that is to put some highlights of CSR activities at a prominent position on the front page of corporate websites and recruitment messages.

#### **3.6.4. Limitations and Future Research**

The study has certain limitations that should be noted. First, we relied on single-source data at one point in time to test our hypotheses, which potentially raises concerns about a common method variance. Although the results suggested that CMV did not pose a major threat to the robustness of the study's findings, future research may better counter the CMV issue by using multi-sourced methods of data collection and longitudinal data (Podsakoff et al., 2012). Second, while our study investigates variables on three levels - macro-level, firm-level and micro-level -, all of them were measured as individual perceptions. In future studies, different measurements for the three levels could be used to develop a real multi-level study. By collecting real-world data, future research could also give insights further into the impacts of the home country reputations, such as ratings on the Corruption Perception Index or Reputation Institute's CountryRep<sup>TM</sup> or Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index, on the reputations and the attractiveness of MNEs. Third, the MNEs' webpages contained more information in the good CSR condition than in the other two conditions. Thus, there might be possible that the

effects of CSR may have instead been the result of simply being exposed to more information. We ruled out this alternative explanation by measuring precisely respondents' perceptions of the MNE's CSR. Future research might investigate the mechanisms through which CSR enhances job-pursuit intention to provide further support for our present findings. Fourth, although we confirmed our expected moderating effect of CSR perception, we did not expect the situation which combines DMNE's high CSR perception and low sincere motive attribution, resulting in lower job-pursuit intention. Given the complexity of strategic CSR for IB, further research should reflect on applicants' expectations. Besides, future research may take a qualitative approach to pursue a deeper understanding of how applicants perceive corporate brands in emerging and developed countries. Fifth, this study used scenarios with five CSR dimensions, but it did not test each dimension of CSR separately. As shown in the preliminary check, these five dimensions are not equally important to applicants. Thus, it would be fruitful to replicate the study using the sub-dimensions of CSR to investigate different influences of each dimension on job-pursuit intention. Sixth, this study focused on the effects of good, mediocre, and poor CSR, but it did not investigate the relative importance of CSR compared to instrumental attributes such as salary. Future research may wish to take a step further by investigating a more complete set of job attributes. In addition, we did not take industry differences into account. The perceived attractiveness of EMNEs is very likely to differ between various industries (Holtbrügge & Kreppel, 2015). For instance, Indian IT firms have a better reputation in Western markets than carmakers of this country. Thus, future work could discuss the impacts of industry types and introduce the concept of industry image, next to country of origin. Finally, we collected cross-national data in three countries, yet we did not compare between those three. Follow-up research is needed to make cross-cultural comparisons with more sophisticated comparative methodologies. Furthermore, while the study shows that CSR influences the size of an EMNE's applicant pool and hence selection system utility, a more practically relevant question for future research is whether CSR influences applicant pool characteristics, or, more precisely, whether CSR helps EMNEs attract not only more applicants, but also better applicants. Our sample only consists of young and highly educated individuals. It is recommended that further research should include a broader sample and measure intellectual abilities to examine whether strong applicants are more willing to look for employers' CSR and use CSR to distinguish among potential employers.

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# Study 1: Employer Attractiveness of EMNEs – The Role of CSR in Overcoming Country-of-Origin Image Constraints in Developed Host Countries

## Appendix

### Appendix 3.1. Screenshots of the webpages

**ABR** OVERVIEW ABOUT US WHY ABR SUSTAINABILITY

We are looking for talented and entrepreneurial people who are looking for new challenges and want to make a difference.

**About us**

We are a Swedish multinational enterprise manufacturing household and professional products for cleaning and hygiene. From our headquarter in Sweden, we have built strong brands worldwide through the efficient coordination of our global network of wholly-owned subsidiaries. Join our team and help us write the next chapter in our success story.

Our compensation package is near the top for the industry with highly competitive average salary and starting salaries and comprehensive benefits.

**Available jobs**

We are recruiting **JUNIOR MANAGERS** in various fields, including Product Management, Marketing, Sales, Finance and Accounting, HR, R&D, and Digital technology for our subsidiaries in **Switzerland, Germany and Austria**.

**Our departments**

At ABR, things are moving fast from day one. Discover all the possibilities and find your dream job.



Marketing



Product Management



Finance and Accounting



R&D



HR



Digital Technology

English

Front page

**ABR** OVERVIEW ABOUT US WHY ABR SUSTAINABILITY

# Sustainability

Responsibility for the future



**Environmental responsibility**

In our day-to-day operations, we continue seeking ways to improve the energy efficiency. Since 2009, we have reduced our global manufacturing waste by **65%** and our greenhouse gas emissions by **43%**. We use renewable energy sources, including wind and geothermal energy, at our facilities. Renewable energy now contributes to **35%** to our total energy use.



**Transparency and green ingredients**

Ever since we started our business, we go beyond the prescribed standards and provide people with important ingredient information according to our Commitment to Transparency, exceeding competitors and government requirements. We work with our scientists to establish a comprehensive list of potential skin allergens. Since 2005, we have also implemented our "Green Ingredient Program" in which we continually improve our products by choosing green and organic ingredients to better protect our consumer health and the environment.



**Social responsibility**

Since 2016, to help combat rising of Zika, dengue and other mosquito-borne diseases, we have given a **14 million USD** donation of our pest-control products as well as direct support for families in need. We also align with non-governmental organizations to deliver products to the areas in need and educate consumers and families about mosquito bite prevention. In April 2020, we donated **1 million USD** to support COVID-19 relief efforts across Europe.



**Our people**

We maintain good relations with our union and encourage our employees to participate in management decision making. We also encourage and support continuing education by offering a variety of training to our employees worldwide, including virtual and in-person. The training focuses on developing skills and strengthens the professional skills and career development skills. Last year we spent **1523 USD** per employee on direct learning expense and an average of **36 hours** of training per employee.



**Diversity and inclusion**

We provide good and equal employment opportunities, regardless of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, marital status, pregnancy, etc. In 2004, we established our Office of Diversity to recognize and support the unique backgrounds, talents and abilities of our people. We provide day care facilities in our offices and are recognized as a best place to work by the Working Mother association.

English

Good CSR

**ABR** OVERVIEW ABOUT US WHY ABR SUSTAINABILITY

# Sustainability

Responsibility for the future



**Environmental responsibility**

We believe that business should be about more than just making money – we understand that it is our responsibility to step up and improve our impact on the planet. We initiated steps leading to our first sustainable development plan aiming at minimizing the impact on climate change.



**Our products**

We are committed to delivering innovative and high-quality products to better protect our consumer health and the environment.



**Social responsibility**

We are committed to contributing to the communities in which we operate. We believe that it is our responsibility to consider the impacts of our business decision on the community.



**Our people and diversity**

We are dedicated to excellence in the workplace for our employees. We also believe in fairness to our employees and the society as a whole regardless of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, veteran status, disability, marital status, pregnancy, etc., taking care to follow all governmental rules. We further plan to facilitate the recruitment process to encourage women to apply for jobs.

English

Mediocre CSR

**ABR** OVERVIEW ABOUT US WHY ABR SUSTAINABILITY

# Sustainability

Responsibility for the future




At ABR, we care about our planet. ABR strictly adheres to all legal environmental requirements at home and abroad. We show all ingredients on our products transparently. In the next few years we will steadily reduce energy consumption in our factories.

English

Poor CSR

## **4. Study 2: How EMNEs and DMNEs Can Attract Applicants in Emerging and Developed Countries – A Cross-National Conjoint Analysis on the Role of Country-of-Origin and CSR<sup>6</sup>**

### **4.1. Introduction**

Attracting an adequately skilled workforce in different countries is a requirement facing all multinational enterprises (MNEs). Due to demographics and the shortage of skilled workers, global competition for talent is intensifying, and to develop suitable international recruiting strategies, MNEs must better understand which attributes are important in job search and drive job choice for potential applicants globally (Held & Bader, 2018).

Previous studies have uncovered important antecedents of applicants' job choice. Drawing on the idea that job choice serves a social identity function conveying information about a person's social identity and self-image (Tajfel, 1974), Lievens and Highhouse (2003) propose that when making their job choice, applicants are concerned with not only basic instrumental or tangible benefits, such as salary and career opportunities, but also the symbolic images that they ascribe to the organization in their job choice to maintain their self-identity, enhance their self-image or express themselves. Specifically, symbolic organizational image inferred from corporate social responsibility (CSR) and country-of-origin (COO) cues, have recently emerged as a reputational asset that helps firms distinguish themselves from their rivals and gain an advantage in the so-called "war for talent" (Held & Bader, 2018; Jones, Newman, Shao, & Cooke, 2019; Zhang, Zhou, van Gorp, & van Witteloostuijn, 2020). Though it has been well established that an MNE's COO and CSR have an influence on applicants' job choice – which is not surprising - little is known about the extent to which applicants value these symbolic attributes relative to instrumental attributes like salary. Most prior studies applied a compositional approach, judging job attributes separately, which failed to consider the interdependency of attributes when evaluated together and their relative importance (Ronda, Abril, & Valor, 2021). Indeed, realistic job offers hardly combine the best of everything. Hence, there is a pressing need for a more rigorous examination of the degree to which applicants trade off the instrumental and symbolic components of job offers to adequately capture the actual trade-off decisions facing applicants in their job choice.

Furthermore, while CSR is a multi-facet construct, extant literature primarily focuses on CSR's overall effects and is virtually silent about whether different facets have differential influences on potential candidates through heterogeneous underlying mechanisms, highlighting the need for more fine-grained analyses of each CSR dimension via differential social-identity functions (Zhao, Wu, Chen, & Zhou, 2022).

As an additional research gap, it still remains largely unknown how different facets of employer image drive applicants' job choices in a cross-national context. This lack of knowledge stems from the fact that much of the research has focused narrowly on developed North American and European host countries (except China), often with developed market MNEs (DMNEs) as employers, as exemplified by a recent review of Cooke, Wood, Wang, and

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<sup>6</sup> Study 2 is in the second round of review for an international academic journal. It was revised and resubmitted in November 2022.

Veen (2019) that only 6% of the studies include emerging MNEs (EMNEs). These findings have limited utility in an increasingly globalized work context, with the center of economic gravity slowly shifting to emerging and developing economies, not only restricted to China. MNEs from both developed and emerging countries have rapidly expanded their operations into emerging markets, hence the increasing need to recruit talent in these markets. This invokes questions of whether MNEs can adopt a global employer branding or should customize to the emerging countries. Further, Cooke et al. (2019) indicate that despite the fact that CSR is at the forefront on the global corporate agenda in today's socially conscious market environment, its role in international HRM is neglected.

Therefore, the study aims at addressing these research gaps by exploring the following questions. First, we extend the international recruitment literature by applying conjoint analysis to investigate: What is the relative importance of (1) MNE's COO (developed vs. emerging) and (2) three CSR dimensions, encompassing the economic, social and environmental responsibilities – the three defining pillars of the triple bottom line concept (Elkington, 1998), as compared to more traditional instrumental attributes in job choice?

Second, we advance the understanding of how job and organizational attributes influence applicants' job choices in a cross-national context by examining whether and to what extent the relative importance of MNE's COO and CSR in job choice varies across countries. In this study, we collect data in an emerging country (Vietnam) and a developed country (the US), with potential applicants' from these countries evaluating job offers from EMNEs and DMNEs. We include emerging markets, as labor markets and as MNEs' origin, to contribute to the under-researched "human side" of emerging markets as well as EMNEs (Meyer & Xin, 2018) and to simultaneously address questions of increasingly practical relevance, such as: Do EMNEs suffer from liabilities of emerging in emerging countries? Do emerging market graduates care for CSR? Can EMNEs overcome their liabilities via CSR? And if yes, via which CSR dimensions in which labor market? While recruitment research has found that EMNEs suffer from double disadvantages of liabilities of foreignness plus liabilities of emergingness when recruiting talent in developed markets (Held & Bader, 2018), the existence and the magnitude of the liabilities of emergingness in emerging markets have still been neglected in the literature. Given the continuing growth of EMNEs in both emerging and developed markets, it is imperative to address this gap (Zhang et al., 2020).

## **4.2. Theoretical Background**

### **4.2.1. The Influence of Instrumental and Symbolic Attributes on Job Choice**

When investigating the relevance of attributes for applicant attraction to organizations, research has identified several outcome variables, including organizational attractiveness (e.g., Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Newbury, Gardberg, & Belkin, 2006), job pursuit intentions (e.g., Hong & Kim, 2017), and job choice (e.g., Montgomery & Ramus, 2011). In this study, we focus on job choice because scholars tend to overlook applicant decisions and instead focus on organizational attractiveness as the focal dependent variable. Organizational attractiveness is a positive affective attitude toward considering an organization a desirable place to work (Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin, & Jones, 2005; Highhouse, Thornbury, & Little, 2007). Rynes (1991: 436), nevertheless, has stressed that "we have virtually no information

about how preferences and intentions are converted into actual job choices.” Indeed, Chapman et al. (2005)’s meta-analysis substantiates that while organizational attractiveness is a significant antecedent of job choice, researchers should be cautious about treating them as proxies for job choice itself. Boswell, Roehling, LePine, and Moynihan (2003) define job search and eventual job choice as a dynamic decision-making process where applicants evaluate organizational/job attributes and recruitment experience to choose jobs in organizations that best fit their needs. It should be noted that “organization” and “job” are interrelated because selection of a given job necessitates selection of a given organization. While the influence of recruitment experience has been discussed in previous studies (Rampl, Opitz, Welpel, & Kenning, 2016), our focus is on organizational/job attributes. Lievens and Highhouse (2003) have classified these job attributes into two broad categories – instrumental and symbolic attributes. The former refers to tangible attributes with utilitarian value to employees, such as pay, benefits, career opportunities, working conditions, whereas the latter denotes intangible attributes with symbolic images, such as prestige or credibility derived from an organizational affiliation. Table 4.1 presents a compilation of studies related to organizational/job attributes and their impacts on job search process and job choice in an international recruitment context.

**Table 4.1. Overview of organizational and job attributes influencing applicant attraction and job choice in international recruitment contexts**

Author(s) (Year)	Sample	Attributes of job or organization <sup>2</sup>	Methodology/Contribution	Limitations
Lievens, Decaesteker, Coetsier, and Geirnaert (2001)	359 final-year engineering and business students in Belgium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Size</li> <li>•Pay mix</li> <li>•Level of internationalization</li> <li>•Level of centralization</li> </ul>	Using policy-capturing and experimental methods to investigate the effect of four organizational characteristics on applicant attraction	Limitation in using hypothetical scenarios (in which respondents are not facing a job choice situation) to measure attribute importance
Moy and Lee (2002)	200 final-year business students in Hong Kong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Career advancement opportunities</li> <li>•Salary</li> <li>•Job security</li> <li>•Managerial relationships</li> <li>•Fringe benefits</li> <li>•Working conditions</li> <li>•Involvement in decision making</li> <li>•Responsibility given</li> <li>•Marketability</li> </ul>	Using direct estimation: respondents were asked to rank the importance of nine job attributes in their job choice and their perceptions of these attributes offered by SMEs and MNEs	Direct estimation poses a high risk of social desirability
Newbury et al. (2006)	4,605 US citizens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Level of internationalization</li> <li>•Foreign ownership</li> </ul>	Using policy-capturing method with online interview to investigate the effect of two foreignness	Only two attributes and no test of relative importance of the attributes

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			dimensions on applicant attraction	
<b>Montgomery and Ramus (2011)<sup>1</sup></b>	759 MBAs in North America and Europe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Task attractiveness</b></li> <li>• Geographic area</li> <li>• Financial package</li> <li>• Ethical reputation</li> </ul>	Using conjoint analysis to measure the relative importance weights for a set of 14 attributes, including CSR, on applicant's job choices	Findings may not be valid for applicants in emerging markets.
<b>Baum and Kabst (2013b)</b>	1,626 engineering upper-level undergraduate students in Germany, Hungary, China, and India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Work climate</b></li> <li>• Career opportunities</li> <li>• Work-life balance</li> <li>• Task attractiveness</li> <li>• Payment attractiveness</li> </ul>	A cross-national study using policy-capturing method to investigate whether the impact of five employer image facets on application intentions varies across countries	Some potentially relevant attributes, such as CSR and COO, are not investigated.
<b>Almaçık, Almaçık, Erat, and Akçin (2014)<sup>1</sup></b>	300 university students in Latvia and Turkey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Work climate</b></li> <li>• Salary</li> <li>• Recognition/appreciation from management</li> </ul>	A cross-national study using direct estimation method to explore the differences in the importance levels of 25 items corresponding to the functional, economic and psychological aspects of employer branding between two countries	Direct estimation poses a high risk of social desirability
<b>Alkire (2014)</b>	626 German, French and American final-year students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• COO</li> <li>• Industry</li> </ul>	Using policy-capturing and experimental methods to explore the influence of COO and country-of-origin images on applicant attraction of EMNEs in developed countries	Studies did not test whether EMNEs could compensate for their lower COO attractiveness by offering higher salaries
<b>Holtbrügge and Kreppel (2015)<sup>1</sup></b>	726 German citizens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• COO</li> <li>• Industry</li> <li>• <b>Salary</b></li> <li>• Job security</li> <li>• Work-life balance</li> <li>• Self-dependent and creative work climate</li> </ul>		
<b>Held and Bader (2018)</b>	287 German business students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• COO image</li> <li>• Corporate character image</li> </ul>		
<b>Zhang et al. (2020)</b>	374 Dutch citizens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cognitive COO image</li> <li>• Affective COO image</li> </ul>		
<b>Hong and Kim (2017)</b>	189 Korean students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• COO</li> <li>• CSR</li> </ul>	Using policy-capturing and experimental methods to investigate whether good CSR weakens the negative relationship between	No test of relative importance of COO and CSR attributes vs. other instrumental

			emerging COO of an MNE and its applicant attraction	attributes such as salary
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<sup>1</sup> There are more than 10 attributes used in these studies. Space does not allow the listing of all attributes, but the top-rated attributes are listed in the attribute column.

<sup>2</sup> The most important attributes (where applicable) are in bold.

While applicants’ attraction to an organization cannot be explained solely based on a few basic attributes (Baum & Kabst, 2013a; Carter & Highhouse, 2014; Montgomery & Ramus, 2011), most prior studies focused on the effects of few instrumental attributes (e.g., pays, benefits). In practice, potential applicants are concerned not only with material gain, but also symbolic images that they ascribe to the organization in their job choice.

According to social-identity theory (Tajfel, 1974), identifying with groups is central to a person’s self-concept. Ashforth and Mael (1989) presented organizational identification as a specific case of social identity in recruitment context, suggesting that employees identify with employing organizations to enhance self-esteem and self-consistency needs. Highhouse et al. (2007), in addition, provide an elaborated mechanism of symbolic attraction, suggesting that applicants select jobs with organizations that possess symbolic image in accordance with their social-identity concerns. To obtain a more detailed understanding of this mechanism, it is important to discuss a firm’s image *for* something specific, rather than its image *per se* (Barich & Kotler, 1991). Highhouse et al. (2007) propose that symbolic image inferences are translated into general impressions of *impressiveness* and *respectability*, which map on the two primary social-identity concerns for applicants in their job choice: (1) social-adjustment concerns relate to the need for approval from significant others; and (2) value-expression concerns relate to the need to express one’s ideals and values. For applicants to make impressiveness or respectable inferences about symbolic attributes, they must receive signals or cues about the organizations. Relying on signaling theory, Rynes (1991) noted that applicants usually have limited information on an organization in the initial phase of the job-choice decision; consequently, they tend to use the information on hand as signals about unknown organizational characteristics to reduce the information asymmetry.

#### 4.2.2. Relevance of COO and of the Three Dimensions of CSR

Applicants are nowadays also able to work, in their home countries, for MNEs from different origins. COO characteristics, particularly development levels, imprint on a country’s companies (Newburry, 2012). For example, Held and Bader (2018) and Holtbrügge and Kreppel (2015) observed “hierarchy of biases” phenomenon, in which firms from developed markets were systematically more attractive than firms from emerging markets. Specifically, developed COO, where there are higher level of industrialization, higher research and development competence, more advanced technologies than emerging COO counterparts, can render symbolic value of prestige or high status and serve as a signal of impressiveness.

Furthermore, researchers have found that signals about organizational endeavors for CSR, broadly defined as “a company’s commitment to minimizing or eliminating any harmful effects and maximizing its long-run beneficial impact on society” (Mohr, Webb, & Harris, 2001), are associated with valued characteristics such as empathy, honor and integrity, giving

a respectable impression (Greening & Turban, 2000; Highhouse et al., 2007; Kim & Park, 2011). This is particularly relevant to growing social awareness and willingness to contribute to the society and environment. KPMG (2020) indicates that the G250 CSR reporting rate rocketed from only 35% in 1999 to 96% in 2020. It is evident that organizations broadcast signals about their CSR to generate a respectable impression, which should also attract applicants. Moreover, CSR, as a loaded construct, can be specified in many ways. At the core, the three dimensions of the triple bottom line concept, aligning the economic, social and environmental responsibilities of business, are the defining pillars of 21<sup>st</sup> century CSR (Elkington, 1998). First, the economic dimension of CSR is not limited to the firm's financial profit but includes its contribution to the community's economy. This includes creating wealth and employment, generating innovation, delivering competitively priced products/services that satisfy consumer needs, paying taxes and avoiding actions that might damage the firm's license to operate in the long run, such as questionable payments and bribery (Książka & Fischbach, 2017). In this sense, the economic dimension directly benefits (prospective) employees as the better the economic sustainability of the firm, the lower the risk of going bankrupt or having to lay-off people (Duarte, Gomes, & das Neves, 2014). More importantly, the global environment in which MNEs operate magnifies the complexity of the ethical challenges confronting them (Cullen & Parboteeah, 2014). For instance, bribery is an ethical difficulty for MNEs, as corruption is rampant in developing countries, and bribery is considered a fact of business. Such practices, however, can result in higher prices and lower-quality products, undermine competition and discourage entrepreneurship, leading to diminishing economic performance and potentially devastating both a company's reputation and the surrounding society (Soon, 2006). Second, the social dimension of CSR is concerned with the direct and indirect business impacts on people, including employees, workers in the supply chain, customers and local communities (Capelle-Blancard & Petit, 2017). This dimension is attracting great attention due to increased public distrust toward MNEs' business practices, as exemplified in scandals, especially regarding human rights violations under "sweatshop" conditions in developing countries (White, Nielsen, & Valentini, 2017). Third, the environmental dimension of CSR has been at the center of the agenda for sustainability since the 1980s. There is ever-growing concern for the environment because the world is facing unprecedented environmental challenges (Scientists4Future, 2021), and the environmental movement has reached a broad mass. According to Fridays for Future (FFF, 2021), from August 2018 to June 2021 more than 100,000 global climate strikes involving 14 million participants took place in 211 countries.

Although research has shed light on the role of COO and CSR in recruitment (Alkire, 2014; Greening & Turban, 2000; Held & Bader, 2018; Holtbrügge & Kreppel, 2015; Hong & Kim, 2017; Zhang et al., 2020), four central premises underlying the use of such attributes merit investigation. First, research has not examined how much MNEs' COO and CSR engagement matter to prospective applicants compared with instrumental attributes such as salary. Most prior studies applied (1) direct estimation, i.e., directly asking respondents to rate the importance of individual attributes, or (2) experimental policy-capturing, i.e., asking respondents to evaluate scenarios describing various levels of a set of attributes and then regressing their responses on the attributes to capture how they use the available information to make the overall evaluation. The former approach gives little insight into how the ratings of

individual attributes are used in actual decisions and is strongly criticized for eliciting socially responsible responses (Karren & Barringer, 2002). The latter improves such limitations, but most policy-capturing studies in Table 1 only examined two attributes and created hypothetical situations that did not require realistic trade-off decisions. In reality, applicants may face a job-choice situation where they need to trade factors such as pay against factors such as corporate social reputation. Montgomery and Ramus (2011) tried to provide preliminary evidence of CSR importance by using the dollar metric method to measure willingness to forego financial benefits for CSR. This method, however, is more prone than the conjoint method to elicit inflated amounts due to social desirability. Thus, there is a need for studies that investigate various attributes in conjunction to adequately take into account potential applicants' actual decision-making process for job choices (Ronda et al., 2021).

Second, although CSR refers to several dimensions of creating value for society: environmental, social, economic, extant literature primarily focuses on CSR's overall effects. However, Zhao et al. (2022) conducted a meta-analysis and found evidence for heterogeneity across studies on different CSR typologies, suggesting differential effects of different CSR facets through heterogeneous mechanisms. Therefore, it would be fruitful to disentangle the effects of various CSR dimensions to shed light on how applicants apply each dimension to fortify their choices, and thus which strategies would work best for MNEs.

Third, COO has its own effects (Held & Bader, 2018; Zhang et al., 2020), but it is unclear how the COO effect can be strengthened or weakened by the CSR effect. Such an international perspective on CSR is missing from the extant literature (Cooke et al., 2019), as the most frequently studied moderators so far are individual-level variables. Jones et al. (2019), nevertheless, underlined that although the vast majority of extant individual-focused CSR research is micro in nature, "the scientific study of these phenomena is by no means restricted to the individual level" (p. 302).

Finally, as much of the research has been conducted in developed countries, it remains unknown whether those findings hold in emerging markets. MNEs operate across national borders, hence they need to attract a broader applicant pool from diverse host national contexts (Held & Bader, 2018). The term national context is rather broad and denotes an indefinite list of a country's contextual factors (e.g., economic, political, institutional, educational, social, and cultural environment) that potentially can shape the preference structures of applicants (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). In this study, we focus on the country development level (i.e., developed versus emerging). The contingency perspective suggests that applicants in emerging countries are embedded in different economic and institutional environments from those in developed countries, so they may attend to different signals or assign different strengths to the same signal (Dögl & Holtbrügge, 2014). Indeed, Connelly, Certo, Ireland, and Reutzel (2011) called for more research on the collective beliefs about a signal. Responding to this call, we add the role of national context (developed versus emerging economies) to the receiving end of signaling theory.

### **4.3. Hypotheses**

#### **4.3.1. Country-of-Origin of the Company**

The object of interest in our study are MNEs that recruit new employees in foreign markets, i.e., outside of their home market. Researchers have found that an MNE's COO

influences local applicants' perceptions about its attractiveness as an employer and, consequently, their job choices (Froese, Vo, & Garrett, 2010; Hong & Kim, 2017). Due to limited information about foreign MNEs and bounded rationality in host countries, COO acts as a heuristic base for judgment and as a simplifier encompassing other organizational aspects (Newbury, 2012). Specifically, COO development levels may dominate the impact of a specific COO. When knowledge is limited, applicants from developed countries may incline to lump all emerging countries together, and applicants from emerging countries, on the other hand, may incline to lump all developed countries together. Since EMNEs suffer from double disadvantages of liabilities of foreignness plus liabilities of emergingness, they are at a disadvantage compared to DMNEs (Zhang, Zhou, van Gorp, & van Witteloostuijn, 2020). In the context of recruitment, the signal sent by EMNEs from emerging countries, which are ranked lower in the country hierarchy and characterized by prevalent institutional voids, lower levels of industrialization, less advanced technology, and late liberalization, evokes a less impressive, lower-status, and less competent image during applicants' screening process (Held & Bader, 2018; Holtbrügge & Kreppel, 2015), thereby failing to address applicants' social adjustment concerns. Thus, applicants are less inclined to take a job at EMNEs, giving rise to the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1: COO influences job choice, with EMNEs being less preferred than DMNEs.*

#### **4.3.2. CSR**

Besides the concern for social adjustment which is directed at obtaining social stature, another important part of applicants' social-identity concerns is value-expression concern, which is focused on convincing others that they are good through affiliation with respectable organizations (Highhouse et al., 2007). By definition, CSR involves trustworthy, responsible and moral behaviors, thereby generating a respectable impression (Carter & Highhouse, 2014; Evans & Davis, 2011; Hong & Kim, 2017; Kim & Park, 2011). In line with the functionalist approach to organizational attraction, CSR would positively affect job choice by fulfilling applicants' value-expression concerns. Jones, Willness, and Madey (2014) showed that CSR influences applicants' job choice through anticipated pride from association with a well-respected organization.

Since CSR is fundamentally a multidimensional construct, we disentangle the effects of economic, social, and environmental CSR. Reviewing former studies (e.g., Greening & Turban, 2000; Hong & Kim, 2017; Jones et al., 2014; Kim & Park, 2011), we find that the social and environmental CSR dimensions are the most commonly studied in research on organizational attractiveness, leaving the economic dimension (beyond profit) under-examined. We propose that the economic dimension is desirable for potential applicants because, at the most basic level, the better the economic sustainability of the firm, the better the long-term employment opportunity. Furthermore, facing the enduring global economic recession from 2008 and the recent potential for a crisis due to the COVID-19 outbreak, people are increasingly concerned about economic sustainability, with a prevalent fear of mass layoffs, poverty and financial risk to governments and public programs (Laborde, Martin, & Vos, 2020). Therefore, we focused on these three interrelated but distinct dimensions (Elkington, 1998). We expect that, as distinct

CSR components, these three dimensions will exert differential influence on applicants. Unlike the other two dimensions, economic dimension is more directly pertinent to business performances and thus also related to impressiveness inference. The differences between social and environment dimensions seem trivial, but Jones et al. (2014) studied the signal-based mechanisms of two CSR practices and found that community involvement, as relatively less helpful for business, does indeed exert stronger pride signal than pro-environmental practices. Further, we anticipate that compared to social CSR, environmental CSR, powered by technological advancement, may generate both respectable and impressive impression. While we expect and intend to investigate the differing effects, in the absence of both a consensus and a theoretical argument to posit which of them is more important than the others (Capelle-Blancard & Petit, 2017; Elkington, 1998), instead of one general hypothesis, three sub-hypotheses are postulated as follows:

*Hypothesis 2: The (a) economic, (b) social and (c) environmental dimensions of CSR each have a positive impact on job choice.*

#### **4.3.3. The Moderating Role of National Context (Developed vs. Emerging Economies)**

Although extensive recruitment research has found empirical evidence that MNEs' COO and CSR signaling have an impact on applicant attraction and eventual job choice, the impacts of these attributes have not been examined in a cross-national setting. This represents a major research gap, as the signaling process is incompletely examined without consideration of the receiver of the signal—local applicants in different countries and the contingency perspective indicates the effectiveness of HR practices depends on the contextual factors, e.g., economics, institutions, and culture (Cooke et al., 2019). People in emerging markets might have different perceptions of COO and CSR than those in Western contexts. While MNEs need to respond to local differences, they also need to standardize and coordinate their operations to capture the benefits of global economies in terms of scale and scope (Rosenzweig, 2006). The main driver of global standardization is that as the world has become more intertwined, markets and people are expected to have become increasingly homogenous (Cleveland & Laroche, 2007; Ohmae, 1989). However, though countries are increasingly interconnected, cultural, economic and institutional differences remain (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004), hence the need for local responsiveness and adaptation.

In light of these views, it is inconclusive whether MNEs should use a standardized or an adapted approach to attract global talent. To solve this dilemma, Baum and Kabst (2013b) proposed a nuanced view of different employer brand attributes; some attributes allow for a higher standardization, while others require local adaptations. Previous cross-national studies provide evidence that the attributes of career opportunities and good work climate have unchanged high levels of importance to applicants in various countries, whereas other attributes, such as work-life balance or task attractiveness, are valued differently across countries (Almıaçık et al., 2014; Baum & Kabst, 2013b). Nevertheless, researchers have not yet investigated the impacts of COO and CSR on applicant attraction around the world.

Regarding the developed/emerging country taxonomy, emerging countries usually differ from developed countries in economic and institutional conditions (Dögl & Holtbrügge,

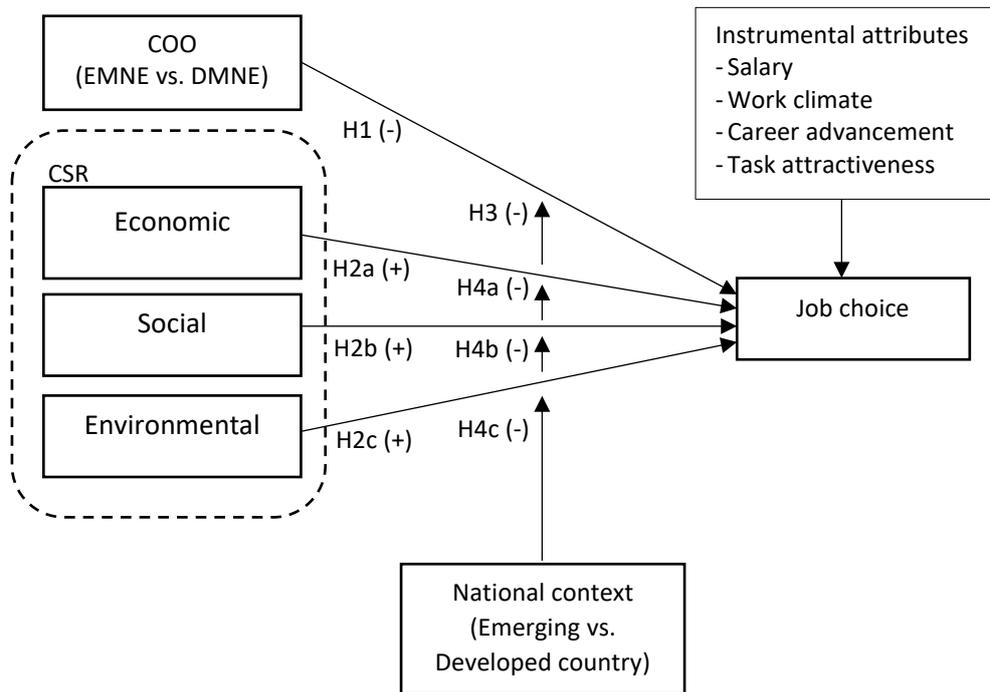
2014; Zhang et al., 2020). Deresky and Christopher (2015) indicated that a country's living conditions have a significant effect on the incentive preferences of individuals. Some empirical studies reveal that the signaling effects of symbolic attributes such as COO or CSR are stronger for employees in developed markets where post-materialistic values are highly relevant. In contrast, instrumental attributes, such as financial incentives and career prospects, are more relevant for employees in emerging markets characterized by lower income and living standards (Caligiuri, Colakoglu, Cerdin, & Kim, 2010). Although real wages have risen rapidly in emerging countries, an immense gap between developed and emerging economies remains (ILO, 2020). Besides economic differences, institutional conditions also offer further support for the differences in CSR valuation. While in developed countries, regulations and laws in favor of CSR have long been established, this subject has only recently gained attention in emerging economies (Dögl & Holtbrügge, 2014). Furthermore, emerging countries are characterized by institutional voids, making it necessary for companies to fill these voids with own commitments and credibility (Khanna & Palepu, 2010). Overall, it is expected that CSR issues are more vital for applicants from developed countries than from emerging countries.

Moreover, signaling theory postulates that individuals will rely less on the available signals, particularly from COO, in their decision-making process when they are familiar with a foreign company (Han, 1989). Since applicants from emerging markets are usually more familiar with EMNEs than those from developed markets, they might have to rely less on COO signals. The literature on the mere-exposure effect, in addition, shows that familiarity tends to trigger positive reactions (Zajonc, 1968). Turban, Lau, Ngo, and Chow (2001) also documented the positive effect of familiarity on a firm's attractiveness as an employer. This logic, in line with signaling theory, implies that applicants from emerging markets know EMNEs better and are more open to evaluating them, which can help lessen the magnitude of liabilities of emergingness. Thus, we hypothesize that:

*Hypothesis 3: The relative importance of COO in job choice is moderated by the national context, such that COO is less important in emerging than in developed countries.*

*Hypothesis 4: The relative importance of the (a) economic, (b) social and (c) environmental dimensions of CSR in job choice is moderated by the national context, such that each is less important in emerging than in developed countries.*

**Figure 4.1. Research model**



#### 4.4. Methodology

##### 4.4.1. Developing an Attribute List

To identify important attributes besides COO and CSR to include in our conjoint analysis, we first conducted a search of the relevant literature. We systematically combined keywords denoting concepts related to employer branding (e.g., employer attractiveness, organizational attractiveness, applicant attraction, recruitment, job choice) with keywords denoting international recruitment (e.g., international companies, foreign companies, cross-cultural, cross-national). We extracted the top attributes from previous studies (see Table 4.1). Two studies revealed work climate to be the most important, and one study each showed salary, level of centralization, career advancement opportunities, and task attractiveness to be the most important.

Next, we conducted two pilot studies to validate our attribute list. First, we carried out 20 semi-structured interviews among potential US and Vietnamese job-seekers. Semi-structured interviews can effectively gain non-influenced and deeper insights into preference structures. The results revealed that salary, task attractiveness, work climate, career advancement opportunities and person-organization value fit were mentioned the most frequently, which partly confirmed our previous attribute selection. Second, we examined whether actual job postings contained information on the selected attributes. We analyzed the content of 50 randomly selected job postings of MNEs from major job boards, namely LinkedIn and CareerBuilder. Statements about work climate were present in 66% of the job postings, followed by information about COO (58%) and about at least one CSR dimension (50%). The postings provided less information about advancement opportunities (44%), task attractiveness (34%) and salary (32%). Information about level of centralization was mentioned in only 12%

of the job postings. These validation steps resulted in a final list of eight salient attributes that applicants are likely to get informed about in real job ads: salary, work climate, career advancement opportunities, task attractiveness, COO and the three dimensions of CSR.

#### **4.4.2. Conjoint Analysis**

Having identified the most relevant job attributes, we applied conjoint analysis to investigate their value and relative importance in employer choice decisions. The conjoint analysis, with its decompositional approach, where the attribute values are decomposed from the overall evaluations of different attributes in combination, can truly calibrate the relative importance of a set of attributes (Baum & Kabst, 2013a; Ronda et al., 2021). Conjoint analysis has been intensively used in marketing to study consumer preference and trade-offs among multiple attributes of a product or service. Recently, it has also been applied to analyze job preferences among applicants (Baum & Kabst, 2013a; Montgomery & Ramus, 2011; Ronda et al., 2021).

For the specificity of our study, we chose choice-based conjoint analysis (CBC), using stated choices (Rao, 2014). First, choice tasks mimic the real behavior more closely than profile ratings, leading to a greater external validity. Second, respondents can make each choice independently without worrying about rating scale consistency over profiles. Third, choice-based methods predict choice probability directly with easily reported estimation results (Elrod, Louviere, & Davey, 1992; Moore, 2004). Fourth, adaptive conjoint analysis (ACA) which is often used for larger sets of attributes, has been shown to have a limitation in pricing research because it tends to understate the importance of price (Orme, 2013). In the recruitment context, the price (or, salary) is an important attribute and the trade-off between salary and COO as well as CSR is relevant for this study which further implies the use of CBC.

#### **4.4.3. Sample**

We collect data in Vietnam and the US, which allows us to compare applicants' perceptions of emerging and developed countries. We distinguish between developed and emerging labor markets because previous studies find evidence that individual incentive preferences may differ between countries with different economic and institutional conditions (Deresky & Christopher, 2015; Dögl & Holtbrügge, 2014). Therefore, the country choice was based on the fact that the USA is the largest economy in the world with strong institutions. Vietnam, on the other hand, is one of the fastest-growing emerging economies with severe institutional voids and challenges (Pham & Dang, 2022). These countries are also considered attractive destinations for foreign investment (Jelili, 2020) and hold divergent ideological and cultural backgrounds, which represents an appropriate context for studying and comparing work value systems across countries.

Vietnamese and US undergraduate students are the main focus of the study because they constitute the majority of the future qualified workforce for MNEs operating in these two countries. Also, the range of potential starting salaries can be identified, allowing us to derive willingness to forego financial benefits for CSR from the conjoint analysis from public data. Reviewing former studies, we find that convenience sampling among students is common in research on applicant attraction and job preference (Alkire, 2014; Baum & Kabst, 2013a; Held

& Bader, 2018). The survey language was English, being the lingua franca for MNEs, so describing company/job profiles of MNEs in English enhances the validity of our experiment. English is, in addition, compulsory at Vietnamese schools from the secondary level onward (Phuong & Nhu, 2015). Moreover, the use of choice instead of scales make the study more resistant to potential language effects occurring in cross-national research (Harzing, Reiche, & Pudelko, 2021; Harzing et al., 2009).

The survey was conducted in July–September 2021 at seven universities and via a crowdsourcing platform. The crowdsourcing platform is suitable for our study because a considerable proportion of crowdworkers are young and currently studying at university (ILO, 2018: 36). To control for the quality of responses, we implemented filter and validity-check questions and time limit options in the survey, following the best practices suggested by Cobanoglu, Cavusoglu, and Turktarhan (2021). The resulting sample comprised  $n = 1,023$  students (Vietnam  $n = 513$ , US  $n = 510$ ), 47.5% of whom were male (Vietnam 48.1%; US 46.9%). The average age was 24.59 (Vietnam 23.36; US 25.8), 72.3% stated that they would finish their studies within one or two years (Vietnam 78.6%; US 66.1%) and 82.6% were seeking a job (Vietnam 76.8%; US 88.4%). To check the representativeness of our samples (particularly for gender distribution), we drew on national statistics. The results (% of male in the national statistics of Vietnam and the US is 53% and 43%, respectively) indicate that the demographic characteristics of our sample are comparable with those of the general population of students in the observed countries.

Furthermore, to test for internal consistency, we included a dominated option within fixed choice tasks that has at least one attribute at a worse level and no attribute at a better level compared to the alternative, in line with Bryan and Parry (2002). If a participant selected this dominated option, it is reasonable to infer that the participant showed a lack of engagement and, consequently, made random choices. We excluded all responses that failed the test by selecting the non-dominant alternative, resulting in a final sample of  $n = 907$ .

#### **4.4.4. Measures**

To develop measures for the attributes, we consulted previous studies (Baum & Kabst, 2013a: 1399-1400; Montgomery & Ramus, 2011: 23-24), followed practical guides on conjoint analysis (Ofek & Toubia, 2014) and interviewed HR experts working for MNEs in the respective countries. We used two levels for each attribute to avoid too many profile cards and, consequently, participant overloading, except for salary and the three CSR dimensions, for which we used three levels each.

We operationalized COO as the location of corporate headquarters to avoid confusion when determining COO due to the increasing globalization of the world economy. According to UNCTAD (2016), the UK, Germany, China and India are the most promising investors from developed and emerging economies, thus, these four countries represent a relevant selection of MNEs' home countries. A pretest was conducted to ensure that these two developed and emerging countries are, in the context of recruitment, homogeneous within and heterogeneous between. Therefore, by randomly varying the country within one group, we reduce idiosyncratic country influence beyond the distinction in developed vs. emerging.

As one of our primary focuses is the CSR attribute, we highlighted three levels for each CSR dimension: good reputation, neutral reputation and poor reputation. We adapted the descriptions of Evans and Davis (2011: 475-476) to clearly depict the relevant CSR challenges faced by MNEs.

The descriptions of the attribute levels seen by participants from both countries were identical, except for salary, which was adapted to the income levels in the USA and Vietnam, respectively. Four experts reviewed all the level descriptions and agreed that they adequately portrayed each attribute's different levels. We also pre-tested our list of attribute levels on 180 participants from Vietnam and the US to further refine the descriptions and ensure there were no ambiguous level descriptors. Specifically, we asked participants to rate all the attribute levels in a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "not attractive at all" to "very attractive." One-way ANOVA and t-tests showed that there are significant differences in the perceived attractiveness between attribute levels ( $p < .05$ ). The attributes and their respective levels in the study are presented in Table 4.2.

**Table 4.2. Attributes and descriptions of attribute levels**

	Attributes	Attribute levels	
1	<i>COO</i> of the company	(a) Developed market (UK, Germany) (b) Emerging market (China, India)	
2	<i>Salary</i> <sup>1</sup> (fixed starting salary in the first year of employment)	VN	US
		(a) 10,300,000 VND p.m. (b) 12,000,000 VND p.m. (c) 13,700,000 VND p.m.	(a) \$49,000 p.a. (b) \$57,000 p.a. (c) \$65,000 p.a.
3	<i>Career advancement opportunities</i> – opportunities for promotion, development, qualification and further education	(a) Fast – accelerated career track to senior positions (b) Slow – no promotion for the first 3 years	
4	<i>Work climate</i> – work attitude of boss, colleagues, and other members of the organization	(a) Colleagues are friendly and supportive (b) Colleagues are distant and competitive	
5	<i>Task attractiveness</i> – how interesting the work is, and amount of routine work involved in your work	(a) Very interesting, diversified work (b) Mostly unvarying routine work	
6	<i>Economic sustainability</i> – organization's growing potential in terms of revenue, earnings, and the number of employees; good track record of paying taxes regularly; and not engaging in any unethical practices such as questionable payments and bribery	(a) Profitable and growing business and good reputation with no record of lawsuits, investigations or fines (b) Profitable but stagnant business and no particular reputation for business practices (c) Business is losing money. The company faced several lawsuits and recently paid a large fine concerning a major bribery scandal.	
7	<i>Social sustainability</i> – organization's reputation for fair treatment and pay of suppliers and of workers	(a) Good reputation for treatment of suppliers and of company's workers in all production countries (b) No particular reputation for treatment of suppliers and of company's workers	

	throughout the organization’s supply chain	(c) Poor reputation for treatment of suppliers and of company’s workers in many production countries
8	<i>Environmental sustainability</i> – organization’s reputation for commitment to environmentally sustainable development by minimizing the impacts of its products and operations.	(a) Good reputation concerning environmentally sustainable development (b) No particular reputation concerning environmentally sustainable development (c) Poor reputation concerning environmentally sustainable development

<sup>1</sup> Following the approach of Baum and Kabst (2013a), the salary figures represent the lower quartile, median and upper quartile of starting salaries among business graduates in 2020 (e.g., National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) salary survey; www.adecco.com.vn). The reported figures were inflated to 2021 and adjusted slightly after we interviewed the HR experts and conducted the pre-test experiment.

#### 4.4.5. Procedure

We developed an online survey using Sawtooth Software, a company specializing in conjoint survey tools. The number of choice tasks per participant was set to 12; each task required a choice between three randomly generated profiles which were randomly selected from 1’296 possible combinations of attributes and factor levels ( $2^4 \times 3^4$ ), based on nearly-orthogonal and level-balanced designs. The questionnaire was generated automatically for each participant, in this case out of a pool of 300 different versions with 12 choice tasks each. Based on our attribute list and sample size, this setting was chosen to achieve optimal balance between not overloading participants and achieving a manageable amount of attribute level overlap for robust estimations at the individual level (Orme, 2019). We also tested the design by using the test design facility integrated into the software. Of the 12 choice sets, two were fixed holdout tasks used solely for cross-validation, following Orme (2019). Each attribute was carefully described at the beginning of the choice task to avoid ambiguity. We instructed the participants that any non-described characteristic, such as working schedule, type of work and location, should be considered to be identical across the three profiles to eliminate potential effects of extraneous factors on their job choices. In addition, attribute order was varied across subjects, allowing us to control order effects while maintaining consistency in attribute display within subjects to minimize confusion. Afterward, additional information about individuals’ personal characteristics (e.g., age, gender, education level, international experience, familiarity with COO) was gathered.

After the survey was conducted, choice models were developed to estimate the utility values for each attribute that produced the maximum likelihood fit to the actual choices. Choice models were traditionally estimated only at the aggregate respondent level by pooling across all individuals. However, with the introduction of the Hierarchical Bayes (HB) estimation, heterogeneity can also be accommodated at the individual respondent level (Hein, Kurz, & Steiner, 2020). HB’s strength is its ability to estimate individual-level utilities given only a few choices from each individual by borrowing information from the sample population and determining the optimal degree to which the upper- and lower-level models influence individual estimates. Thus, we used HB for our final model. In our final model, we computed the hit rate and the mean absolute value of the difference between the actual and simulated shares for our two holdout tasks that were not used to develop the model. The average hit rate across respondents is 65.05%, close to the hit rates for previous CBC studies (SawtoothSoftware,

2021). Table 4.3 also shows that the simulated choice shares are very similar to the actual choice shares (mean absolute error = 3.52), supporting the validity of our model.

**Table 4.3. Validity check**

	Profiles	Actual choice shares (%)	Simulated choice shares (%)	Absolute error
Holdout task 1	1	55.5	55.4	0.1
	2	44.4	40.4	4
	3	0	4.2	4.2
Holdout task 2	1	50.3	49.5	0.8
	2	49.7	44.1	5.6
	3	0	6.4	6.4

## 4.5. Results

### 4.5.1. Hypotheses Tests

We relied on the relative importance weights for each attribute to test our hypotheses. The overall results are first presented to test Hypotheses 1 and 2. Then, the results for each country are shown for Hypotheses 3 and 4.

Table 4.4 reports the importance weights for each attribute across the 907 respondents. For perspective, the last column shows the importance of each attribute relative to salary. Further, attributes are combined into different groups, in which the importance weights between attributes in different groups are statistically significantly different from each other, but only insignificantly different from other attributes within a group ( $p < .05$ ).

COO is ranked second with a relative importance of 0.995 for salary, with DMNEs being preferred over EMNEs ( $U_{\text{developed}} = 56.16$ ;  $U_{\text{emerging}} = -56.16$ ). Thus, Hypothesis 1 is supported. The economic dimension of CSR is ranked third and has 95% of the importance of salary, followed by the environmental and social dimensions. As expected, for all dimensions, good CSR is preferred over neutral and poor CSR (Economic:  $U_{\text{good}} = 35.17$ ;  $U_{\text{neutral}} = 7.12$ ;  $U_{\text{poor}} = -42.28$ ; Environmental:  $U_{\text{good}} = 24.89$ ;  $U_{\text{neutral}} = 2.38$ ;  $U_{\text{poor}} = -27.28$ ; Social:  $U_{\text{good}} = 28.31$ ;  $U_{\text{neutral}} = -2.91$ ;  $U_{\text{poor}} = -25.39$ ). Therefore, Hypotheses 2a–c are supported. Salary, COO, and the economic dimension of CSR are essentially equal in importance and they are statistically and substantively more important than environmental and social CSR.

Table 4.4 also reports the importance weights for each country. It becomes apparent that the national context moderates the relative attribute importance. To statistically test the moderating effects, we considered the importance weights for each respondent as the dependent variable and the country (Vietnam=1) as the independent variable in a set of regression analyses (Table 4.5). We found no significant effect from the national context on the perceived value of COO. Consequently, Hypothesis 3 is not supported. Nevertheless, despite the insignificant difference between the countries for this variable, it is surprising to observe that COO is ranked higher and significantly more important than salary in Vietnam. There are, however, significant effects from the national context on the perceived value of the three CSR dimensions

(economic:  $\beta = 0.102$ ,  $p < .01$ ; social:  $\beta = -.066$ ,  $p < .05$ ; environmental:  $\beta = -.107$ ,  $p < .01$ ). This shows that applicants from emerging markets, here Vietnam, attach more value to the economic dimension of CSR but less to the social and environmental dimensions. Thus, Hypothesis 4a is not supported, whereas Hypotheses 4b and 4c are supported. As a robustness check, we conducted t-tests to compare the importance weights between the respondents from Vietnam and the US (Table 4.6). The t-test results converged with the regression analysis.

**Table 4.4. Average and relative importance weights**

	Attribute and rank of attribute <sup>1</sup>		Importance weight	Confidence interval 95%	Relative importance
Total (n = 907)	Group 1	1. Salary	17.03	[16.33; 17.74]	1.000
		2. COO	16.95	[16.08; 17.83]	0.995
		3. Economic dimension of CSR	16.24	[15.62; 16.86]	0.953
	Group 2	4. Environmental dimension of CSR	12.03	[11.60; 12.47]	0.706
	Group 3	5. Social dimension of CSR	11.06	[10.67; 11.45]	0.649
		6. Advancement opportunities	10.72	[10.26; 11.18]	0.629
	Group 4	7. Work climate	8.92	[8.50; 9.35]	0.524
	Group 5	8. Task attractiveness	7.04	[6.63; 7.45]	0.413
US (n = 445)	Group 1	1. Salary	21.98	[20.51; 23.45]	1.000
	Group 2	2. COO	15.48	[14.34; 16.62]	.704
	Group 3	3. Environmental dimension of CSR	13.90	[13.14; 14.25]	.632
		4. Economic dimension of CSR	13.29	[12.55; 14.04]	.605
		5. Social dimension of CSR	12.41	[11.75; 13.06]	.565
	Group 4	6. Advancement opportunities	8.98	[8.33; 9.62]	.408
	Group 5	7. Task attractiveness	7.09	[6.51; 7.66]	.323
		8. Work climate	6.88	[6.37; 7.40]	.313
Vietnam (n = 462)	Group 1	1. Economic dimension of CSR	17.95	[16.97; 18.92]	1.000
		2. COO	16.69	[15.44; 17.94]	.930
	Group 2	3. Salary	14.58	[13.48; 15.39]	.813
	Group 3	4. Advancement opportunities	11.52	[10.84; 12.21]	.642
		5. Social dimension of CSR	10.74	[10.18; 11.31]	.599
		6. Environmental dimension of CSR	10.63	[10.10; 11.16]	.592
		7. Work climate	10.48	[9.79; 11.18]	.584
	Group 4	8. Task attractiveness	7.40	[6.81; 7.98]	.412

<sup>1</sup>Attributes are ordered in descending order of importance weights. Attributes are combined into different groups, in which the importance weights between attributes in different groups are statistically significantly different from each other, but insignificantly different from other attributes within a group ( $p < .05$ ).

**Table 4.5. Regression analysis**

Independent variable	National context (Vietnam=1)							
	Value of COO	Value of economic CSR	Value of social CSR	Value of environmental CSR	Value of salary	Value of advancement opportunities	Value of work climate	Value of task attractiveness
$\beta$	-.024	<b>.102</b> **	<b>-.066</b> *	<b>-.107</b> **	<b>-.121</b> ***	.054	<b>.074</b> *	.008
$F$	.510	9.465	3.906	10.551	13.536	2.654	5.001	.058
Equation $R$ -square	.001	.010	.004	.012	.015	.003	.005	.000

Note: n = 907. National context was coded as 0 = US, 1 = Vietnam.

+p < .10. \*p < .05. \*\*p < .01. \*\*\*p < .001.

**Table 4.6. T-tests**

	Value of COO	Value of economic CSR	Value of social CSR	Value of environmental CSR	Value of salary	Value of advancement opportunities	Value of work climate	Value of task attractiveness
Mean differences (Vietnam vs. US)	-.016	<b>.019</b> **	<b>-.008</b> *	<b>-.014</b> **	<b>-.026</b> ***	.029 +	<b>.029</b> *	.005

+p < .10. \*p < .05. \*\*p < .01. \*\*\*p < .001.

**Table 4.7. Correlation matrix between the conjoint analysis attributes**

	COO	Salary	Advancement opportunities	Work climate	Task attractiveness	Economic dimension of CSR	Social dimension of CSR	Environmental dimension of CSR
COO	1							
Salary	<b>-.075*</b>	1						
Advancement opportunities	-.041	<b>.076*</b>	1					
Work climate	-.050	-.015	-.009	1				
Task attractiveness	.017	-.064 <sup>+</sup>	.011	-.032	1			
Economic dimension of CSR	<b>-.149***</b>	<b>-.363***</b>	-.036	.010	-.029	1		
Social dimension of CSR	<b>-.082*</b>	<b>-.223***</b>	.026	-.025	-.014	.032	1	
Environmental dimension of CSR	-.048	<b>-.231***</b>	-.051	.007	-.031	.001	.046	1

<sup>+</sup> $p < .10$ . \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

#### **4.5.2. Supplementary Analysis**

Table 4.7 presents the correlation matrix between the attributes. There are significant negative correlations between salary and other attributes, namely COO and the CSR dimensions. It is reasonable to infer that for the potential candidates, salary serves as a compensatory rather than complementary factor for COO and CSR. On this basis, equity theory (Adams, 1965), which addresses how individuals evaluate social exchange relationships, seems to apply when applicants choose among job offers (Baum & Kabst, 2013a). Our results imply that applicants use salary to resolve perceived inequity between job offers. In other words, applicants may be willing to accept a lower salary to work for a firm from a developed (versus emerging) country or with good (versus neutral) CSR.

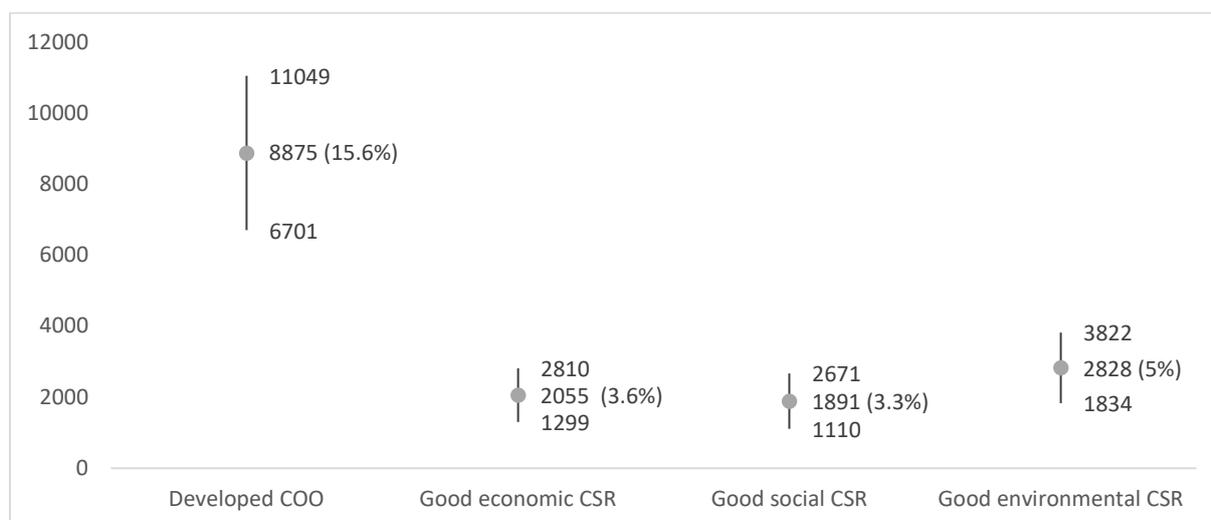
Using the conjoint market simulator simulating a thousand competitive job offerings via a sampling of scenario approach, we can attach monetary value to these factors. The market simulator is useful for converting raw conjoint (utility) data into managerially useful data, such as simulated choices or shares of preference/choice. Specifically, competitive profiles can be introduced within a simulated market scenario; then the simulator is run for each respondent to predict their choice according to their utilities with the assumption that the profile with the highest total utility is chosen and finally computes the percentage of respondents projected to choose each profile (also referred to as a share of preference).

Basically, the method to derive willingness to pay involves first simulating a job choice for the less favorable version of a job offer (e.g., emerging COO, neutral CSR) against a set of other competitive offerings. Next, the job offer is enhanced (e.g., developed COO, good CSR) and the algorithm tries to decrease the salary to drive the share of preference back down for the enhanced job offer. The reduction in salary that leads to equality in preference shares between enhanced and base versions of job offers is the willingness to pay. We repeated the simulation multiple times using 300 bootstrap samples with 30 competitive scenarios per bootstrap sample to estimate confidence intervals for willingness to pay for CSR and COO (Orme, 2021).

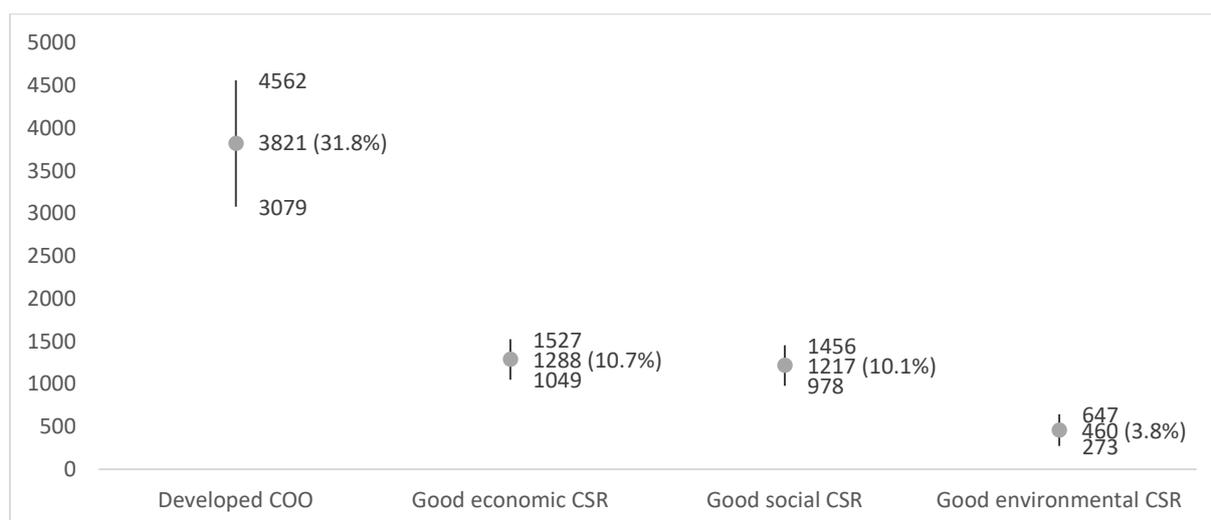
The results are displayed in Figure 4.2 for the US sample and in Figure 4.3 for the Vietnamese sample. In particular, American applicants would be willing to forgo 15.6% of their salary to work for DMNEs (versus EMNEs) (31.8% for Vietnamese applicants). This is also illustrated by our first fixed holdout task, in which the profiles are identical, except for the differences in terms of COO and salary: developed COO is combined with the medium salary in profile 1, while emerging COO is combined with a higher salary level in profile 2. Despite the 14% difference in salary, DMNEs (55.5% probability of being chosen) were still evaluated more favorably than EMNEs (44.4% probability).

Concerning CSR, American applicants would be willing to forgo about 3.6%, 3.3% and 5% (10.7%, 10.1% and 3.8% for Vietnam) of their salary in return for good (versus neutral) economic, social and environmental CSR, respectively.

**Figure 4.2. Willingness to pay in terms of a reduced salary (\$) for US sample**



**Figure 4.3. Willingness to pay in terms of a reduced salary (thousand VND) for Vietnamese sample**



Note: The figures denote the mean willingness to pay along with the lower and upper bound of the 95% confidence interval, using bootstrap sampling with 300 samples and 30 competitive sets per sample. Mean willingness to pay as % of expected salary in parentheses.

Furthermore, there are significant negative correlations between COO and the economic and social CSR dimensions. It can be inferred that good CSR may help EMNEs to close the gap with DMNEs regarding applicant attraction. Thus, we also used a market simulator to explore this interaction. First, we simulated job choice with two identical profiles, excluding COO. Then, we changed the profile of EMNEs to include good CSR and ran the simulation again. Table 4.8 shows that good CSR helps EMNEs to strongly reduce the gap in the share of preference with DMNEs. For US respondents, the preference for DMNEs over EMNEs is reduced from 30.2% to 9.4%; for Vietnamese respondents, it is reduced from 46% to 8%.

**Table 4.8. Market simulation for share of preference**

US		
	Simulation 1 (neutral CSR)	Simulation 2 (good CSR)
EMNE	34.9%	45.3%
DMNE	65.1%	54.7%
<i>Difference</i>	30.2%	9.4%
Vietnam		
EMNE	27.0%	46.0%
DMNE	73.0%	54.0%
<i>Difference</i>	46.0%	8.0%

#### 4.6. Discussion

##### 4.6.1. General Discussion

We find that COO and CSR are important factors to attract applicants. Specifically, our findings indicate that EMNEs are confronted with a significant HR challenge when attracting talent not only in developed markets but also in emerging countries. This is consistent with lists of the “100 Best Companies to Work for” in Vietnam and in the US (Fortune, 2020; VnExpress, 2020), which are dominated by DMNEs. In Vietnam, only 9 EMNEs appear in the top 100; in the US, not a single EMNE appears on the list. Previous research has documented the recruiting challenge facing EMNEs in developed markets (Held & Bader, 2018; Holtbrügge & Kreppel, 2015), but less is known about EMNEs in emerging markets. Pertinently, our simulations and holdout task indicate that offering a much higher salary (at least 15% in the US and 31% in Vietnam) is needed to keep EMNEs competitive with their counterparts from developed markets in the war for talent. This effect was also demonstrated in our holdout task.

Concerning CSR, our conjoint results show that each of the three dimensions is important. Particularly, both American and Vietnamese applicants would be willing to forgo a part of their salary in return for good (versus neutral) economic, social and environmental CSR. Moreover, we find a significant interaction between COO and CSR; good CSR indeed helps EMNEs close the gap to DMNEs.

We reveal cross-national differences in attribute valuation, in line with Baum and Kabst (2013b). In particular, the national context influences the importance of the three CSR dimensions, but not the importance of COO. However, despite insignificant differences in COO importance, it is interesting to observe that in Vietnam, COO (ranked 2<sup>nd</sup>) is more important than salary (ranked 3<sup>rd</sup>). Unexpectedly, EMNEs suffer more from the liability of emergingness in emerging countries. The mere-exposure literature claims that familiarity can lead to greater liking. On the other hand is the argument that familiarity can breed contempt, i.e., the more experience individuals have with an object, the more likely they will encounter evidence of dislike, which might result in less liking (Norton, Frost, & Ariely, 2007). This confrontation signifies that the familiarity-perception relationship may be contingent upon context (Zhang et al., 2020) and that cross-national differences in attribute valuation cannot be explained solely by economic and institutional condition differences. National context can also encompass

aspects of culture (Cooke et al., 2019). Self-concept theory could be integrated to explain this finding. Markus and Kitayama (1991) distinguish the independent and interdependent construal of self. While the former is dominant in Western cultures, with the belief that distinct individuals are inherently separate, the latter is more common in Asian cultures with the idea that identity also lies in one's social, familial and professional relationships. For those with interdependent selves, public perceptions and social roles are central to their identity, leading to the Asian focus on the "face," which was conceptualized by Goffman (1955: 213) as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self-delineated in terms of approved social attributes." Though it is a universal concept, face is particularly important in collectivist cultures of Asia and is claimed to significantly regulate individual behavior (Kim & Nam, 1998). Researchers have developed the concept of face and face consumption to explain Asia being one of the biggest markets for luxury goods from the West despite the population's relatively low income (Biondi, 2020; Li & Su, 2007). Face consumption could be transferred to the recruiting context. Due to the importance of "face", Vietnamese applicants place more emphasis on publicly visible factors, especially MNEs' COO. Indeed, Woodard et al. (2016) find evidence that employer prestige linked to an MNE's COO is a more visible indicator of success than salary and position. In other words, because of the prestige and impressive image that applicants ascribe to Western companies, working for DMNEs might make applicants feel they have "face" that they would lack if working for EMNEs.

On the one hand, as expected, applicants from Vietnam (an emerging market) attach less value to the social and environmental dimensions, but on the other hand, they put more emphasis on the economic dimension of CSR compared to applicants from the US (a developed market). Notably, the economic dimension of CSR is not purely a socially responsible dimension but contains an egoistic dimension linked to long-term job security (Guerci, Radaelli, Siletti, Cirella, & Shani, 2015). According to data from ILO (2016), non-standard and temporary workers account for almost 70% of employment in Vietnam, compared to 3.5% in the US. These workers typically have low job security and are usually unprotected by law regarding occupational safety and health and social protection, including unemployment benefits. This high percentage of non-standard and temporary workers in Vietnam may partly explain the high preference for the economic dimension of CSR.

#### **4.6.2. Theoretical and Methodological Contributions**

We applied conjoint analysis in a cross-national comparison to examine how different employer image attributes impact job choices and whether these impacts vary across countries. Subsequently, this study contributes to the literature in the following ways. First, we contribute to the international HR literature by calibrating the relative importance of MNEs' COO and CSR associating with symbolic inferences about employer impressiveness and respectability against other salient workplace aspects in job choice. Although a growing number of studies examine the attractiveness of COO and CSR for applicants, many rely solely on perception-based evaluation of employer attractiveness in quasi-experimental designs with compositional approach and, consequently, fail to capture the actual job choice event and calibrate the relative importance of these symbolic attributes when evaluated with other aspects. This study enriches

the understanding of applicants' job-choice process by applying a novel decompositional approach, which more accurately reflects the process in which applicants compare job offers with one another holistically and make trade-off decisions in real life. While we confirm the orthodoxy that salary, the most basic instrumental attribute, always plays an important role, other attributes with symbolic images, particularly MNEs' COO and CSR, are gaining importance. We advance previous studies indicating the positive influence of COO and CSR on applicants' perception of organizational attractiveness (Alkire, 2014; Evans & Davis, 2011; Held & Bader, 2018; Hong & Kim, 2017) by demonstrating that these symbolic attributes not only influence applicant attraction, but also matter in later phase of job choice. Therefore, it is necessary for researchers to adopt a multi-perspective lens and consider both instrumental and symbolic factors when studying the impact of employer image on recruitment outcomes.

Second, we contribute to the ongoing debate on whether EMNEs suffer from the liability of emergingness in recruiting by empirically demonstrating that they indeed do, even within the emerging markets themselves. While the disadvantages of EMNEs in developed markets are recognized (Held & Bader, 2018; Zhang et al., 2020), so far recruitment research did not empirically investigate the existence and the magnitude of the liability of emerging in emerging markets. Thus, our study contributes to the literature on the liability of origin, especially the liability of emergingness, and aligns it with international human resource management, bringing both fields forward.

Third, we contribute to the measurement of CSR by showing that a more detailed perspective should be applied to study the impact of CSR on recruitment-related outcomes. Reviewing prior studies, we find a tendency to examine only CSR's overall effects or to focus on the social and environmental dimensions, leaving the economic dimension under-researched. Our results suggest that all three CSR dimensions are important to applicants. Also, while they are interrelated in the conceptualization, we find empirical evidence that each dimension indeed exerts a distinctive influence on job choice as their important weights are not significantly correlated (Table 7). This raises an intriguing possibility: the three CSR aspects influence job choice through heterogeneous underlying mechanisms, beyond merely respectable impression. Thus, integrating different CSR dimensions into one overall scale or relying upon any one dimension as a surrogate for the others may be flawed, which lends support to Zhao et al. (2022) call for a more fine-grained conceptualization of CSR.

Fourth, the study expands the horizons of individual-focused CSR research and contributes to the international HRM literature by providing preliminary evidence suggesting an interplay between MNEs' COO and CSR on job choice. Our results show that while good social and environmental CSR (ranked 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> on the importance scale) alone may not strongly drive job choice of applicants from emerging markets, they exert a notable effect for EMNEs, helping EMNEs to close the gap with DMNEs. This implies that impressions of impressiveness and respectability are interrelated. These impressions also map on two fundamental dimensions underlying inferences in social cognition, namely competence and warmth (Carter & Highhouse, 2014). There is, moreover, evidence that warmth impression has halo effects, spilling over into competence (Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007), explaining why CSR can diminish the magnitude of liabilities of emergingness.

Finally, by shifting the focus from individual values to the national differences, we expand Highhouse et al. (2007)'s symbolic attraction mechanism and show that preferences for job/organizational attributes are contingent upon national context encompassing aspects of socio-economics, institutional environments, and culture. This also contributes to the international standardization versus adaptation discussion. Our study reveals that national differences lead to different valuations for some employer image attributes. This finding lends support to Baum and Kabst (2013b) middle-ground contingency approach: some instrumental facets (e.g., work-life comfort, salary) require cross-national adaptation while others (e.g., advancement opportunities) allow for a higher degree of standardization. We advance this statement by demonstrating that this approach is true not only for instrumental but also symbolic attributes. Therefore, aligning cross-national studies with a nuanced view of different instrumental and symbolic attributes could be pertinent for future international recruitment.

#### **4.6.3. Managerial Implications**

Our findings provide several managerial implications. To attract highly qualified applicants from diverse cultures, managers of MNEs need to understand the antecedents of applicants' choice and to coordinate their employer branding activities on an international scale to optimize the cost-benefit ratio. Despite the persistence of certain cross-national differences, the overall influential structure on job choice remains largely similar across countries. Thus, MNEs can adopt a universal positioning to strengthen the brand image and capture the benefits of global economies of scale and scope. In particular, a combination of COO, salary, CSR and advancement opportunities can attract talent.

MNEs cannot change their COO, but they can develop suitable recruitment strategies acknowledging its effect. For instance, DMNEs should emphasize their positive country-of-origin image in international recruitment because COO is important in both developed and emerging markets and applicants are willing to forego a substantial portion of their salary to work for DMNEs. In contrast, EMNEs should offer a higher salary, provide more attractive advancement opportunities, and engage in good CSR to overcome the COO constraints when hiring talent.

Salary and advancement opportunities are, unsurprisingly, important attributes. However, symbolic factors, such as CSR, which stand a better chance of distinguishing a firm within the same industry, are as important. Developing a positive CSR reputation is a strategic choice as CSR has been found to enhance person-organization fit, which significantly improves job performance and commitment (Jones et al., 2014; Kim & Park, 2011). Although our findings indicate that a high salary can compensate for poor CSR, companies may run the risk of hiring ill-fitting applicants, leading to high turnover in the long term. It is crucial for managers to direct CSR in a congruent way because there is a broad spectrum, and every dimension correlates with each of the others. More pertinently, while academics and HR consultants emphasize social and environmental aspects, firms should not neglect communicating the economic dimension of CSR. Applicants are likely to be more concerned with practices contributing to the firm's long-term survival and profitability, especially when experiencing the economic difficulties caused by the enduring global economic recession from the 2008 crisis and the recent potential crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular,

for MNEs operating in emerging markets where much of the labor force is temporarily employed, emphasizing job security via economic CSR is highly recommended.

#### **4.6.4. Limitations and Future Research**

The paper has certain limitations. First, job choice has been shown to be influenced by further factors, such as work-life balance or person-organization fit. However, due to the chosen methodology, we were unable to include a larger number of attributes. The number of required full-profile evaluations in the conjoint analysis grows exponentially with the number of attributes. Future studies could examine more or other attributes. Moreover, while our approach allowed a more accurate measures of applicants' trade-offs, we have not identified the noncompensatory attributes of job choice, based on a non-compensatory violation of fit perspective (Held & Bader, 2018). Future research could explore this issue and enrich our understanding of the job-choice process by distinguishing between the attributes that serve as knock-out criteria and those that can be compensated.

Second, we only covered four MNE COOs. Although these countries are relevant and interesting for scholars and practitioners, future research should cover a larger number for more representative results. The Next-Eleven countries, for example, may hold interest because their companies are also expanding into developed and other emerging countries. While prior research has focused primarily on the major emerging economies, such as BRIC, as the home countries of EMNEs, attention should now be shifted to the Next-Eleven countries (Cooke et al., 2019; Held & Bader, 2018).

Third, we only collected data on applicants' choices in one emerging country (Vietnam) and one developed country (US), which imposes certain limitations on our capacity to distinguish the effects of culture and institutional differences from each other and from other contextual factors (e.g., educational, social, political situations, etc.). It would be fruitful to replicate the study across a broader range of national contexts. When data on more countries with divergent national institutions, cultures and economic development are available, it would be possible to explore which economic/institutional factors and cultural dimensions underlie the differences in potential applicants' valuation of employer image facets. Another limitation regarding the sampling is that we used a convenience sample of students, which may bring the generalizability of our results into question. Nevertheless, it does not diminish the importance of our contribution as students constitute the majority of the qualified workforce for companies and companies are targeting their recruitment efforts at making themselves appealing to young students (Jones et al., 2014).

Finally, our survey was distributed during the global COVID-19 crisis. The current economic downturn, coupled with large-scale social restrictions and mass layoffs (Laborde et al., 2020), might have influenced the importance of economic sustainability, particularly in emerging markets. While the relative importance of some traditional attributes is likely to remain stable over time, new attributes may prevail in the future. Longitudinal studies, moreover, could lend insights into how the role of a MNE's COO changes in the future, especially when EMNEs establish themselves in the global markets and become better known by applicants worldwide.

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## **5. Study 3: Understanding the Relevance of CSR for Recruiting in Emerging Markets: An Examination of the Underlying Mechanisms and the Interplay between the Three Dimensions of CSR and the Foreign Firm's Country of Origin<sup>7</sup>**

### **5.1. Introduction**

The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century witnessed the rapid development of emerging markets. Since then, these markets have systematically outperformed the economies of others. With the center of economic gravity slowly shifting to emerging economies (OECD, 2021), it is little wonder that many firms have increasingly expanded their operations to emerging markets (Liedong, Peprah, Amartey, & Rajwani, 2020); hence, they need to attract and recruit talent from these markets. Nevertheless, the vast majority of recruitment research has been conducted in Western contexts (with the exception of China) and often with domestic companies as employers, creating a gap regarding how foreign firms can be competitive in the race for talent in emerging markets (Allen & Vardaman, 2017; Cooke, Wood, Wang, & Veen, 2019). To address this research gap, we look at the specific case of foreign firms in India and Vietnam. These two countries are among the fastest-growing emerging markets and are attractive destinations for foreign investment (Jelili, 2020). As a result, their labor markets already face the challenge of shrinking talent pools to support the rapid growth and exploding demand, leading to ever-intensifying competition for scarce highly skilled employees (Lindgren, 2021).

As recruitment becomes more competitive in emerging markets, there is an increasing need for foreign firms to understand how to build a powerful employer reputation to attract potential applicants in these markets. The recruitment literature has uncovered important antecedents of applicant attraction and their employment-related intentions and behaviors. Basic instrumental and tangible attributes, such as salary and career opportunities, have become less useful for firms to differentiate themselves due to the interchangeability of jobs and organizational profiles within the same industry, in tandem with the rudimentary knowledge of applicants (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). However, symbolic organizational image, such as corporate social responsibility (CSR), has recently emerged as a reputational asset that helps firms distinguish themselves from their rivals and gain an advantage in the so-called “war for talent” (Dawkins, Jamali, Karam, Lin, & Zhao, 2016; Evans & Davis, 2011). Yet, little is known about the underlying mechanisms and contingency factors that explain how and when CSR influences job applicants' outcome variables associated with their attraction to organizations (Gond, El Akremi, Swaen, & Babu, 2017; Pope & Kim, 2021). Therefore, more comprehensive studies of these questions are needed to continue to advance the micro-CSR literature that examines the effects of CSR at the individual level.

Applying signaling theory (Rynes, 1989) as an overarching framework, we test the mechanisms that mediate the relationship between CSR and applicants' job-pursuit intention, acknowledged as one of the most important and consistent variables to gauge the utility of recruitment from job applicants' perspective (Aiman-Smith, Bauer, & Cable, 2001; Zhang &

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<sup>7</sup> Study 3 is under review in an international academic journal.

Gowan, 2012). Specifically, we propose that potential applicants will rely on CSR signals to make inferences about organizational warmth and competence—the two universal dimensions of social perception (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2008; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). We expect that different aspects of CSR, as a multidimensional construct, will signal different social perceptions of warmth and/or competence and different attitudes and behaviors toward a firm, adding a more nuanced mechanism between CSR, social perception, and job-pursuit intention toward a firm. In addition to the independent association with applicants' job-pursuit intention of each CSR aspect, we investigate how applicants combine signals on multiple aspects of CSR to explore the optimal CSR configuration for firms. To do so, we employ the definition of CSR first developed by Carroll (1979) and later refined by Schwartz and Carroll (2003), which encompasses the entire range of business accountability—economic, legal, and ethical responsibilities. This category is particularly relevant in the context of emerging markets, where institutional voids are pervasive, allowing firms to escape their economic, legal, and ethical responsibilities, as exemplified in scandals such as bribery, tax evasion, labor rights violations under “sweatshop” conditions, and pollution (Tashman, Marano, & Kostova, 2019; Zhao, Tan, & Park, 2014).

Further, these two dimensions of warmth and competence can influence the social perception of not only individuals or organizations, but also countries (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007). Extending this logic, we suggest the warmth and competence perception of firms' countries of origin as a moderator of CSR and applicants' job-pursuit intention. Such an international perspective on CSR appears lacking from the extant literature (Cooke et al., 2019). Firm country of origin has been studied extensively in the marketing literature and has been found to have a significant effect on foreign products' evaluations and purchase intentions (Martin & Eroglu, 1993). This effect can be transferred to the international recruiting context as country perception or stereotype has a halo effect, influencing the perception of a country's companies (Newbury, 2012). We assert that CSR may have differential effects based on the (mis)alignment of CSR strategies with the stereotype of the firm's country of origin.

Our study contributes to the CSR and recruitment literature in the following ways. First, extending the micro-CSR perspective, we bring the notion of warmth and competence perception, drawn from the social psychology research, to examine the signal-based mechanism behind the effect of CSR on applicants' job-pursuit intention. This idea was inspired by the study of Carpentier, Van Hove, and Weijters (2019); Shea and Hawn (2019). However, they did not disentangle the effects of various aspects of CSR. Our work uses a fine-grained conceptualization of CSR to more accurately capture the mechanism of how CSR influences applicants (Zhao, Wu, Chen, & Zhou, 2022). Each aspect of CSR would have an independent impact on an applicant's job-pursuit intention, and there would be interaction effects wherein synergies develop among the various aspects of CSR and the firm's country of origin.

Second, by adding an international dimension and examining the interaction between CSR and a firm's country of origin, the study expands the horizons of individual-focused CSR research. The most frequently considered moderators so far are individual-level variables (Gond et al., 2017), such as moral identity, personal relevance of CSR, socio-environmental

consciousness, or CSR education. Jones, Newman, Shao, and Cooke (2019) nevertheless underlined that even though the vast majority of extant individual-focused CSR research is micro in nature, “the scientific study of these phenomena is by no means restricted to the individual level” (p. 302). Therefore, it is necessary for future research to reflect this reality.

Finally, by applying controlled experimental methods, we are able to assess causality and test the underlying mechanisms with a higher degree of internal validity compared to survey-based methods. This also answers the call for more experimental work, which is mostly absent from international business research (Zellmer-Bruhn, Caligiuri, & Thomas, 2016). Moreover, in the analysis, we embrace the inherently configurational rationale embedded in international business by applying fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA), which complements regression-based conditional process analysis to uncover different complex causal pathways leading to the same outcomes.

## **5.2. Theoretical Background**

### **5.2.1. Literature Review**

A literature review of previous empirical studies that examine the impact of CSR on prospective employees and job applicants was conducted through multiple computer-based literature searches using the Google Scholar, EBSCO, and Web of Science databases with relevant keywords (e.g., *corporate social responsibility, corporate social performance, social responsibility, corporate citizenship, employer attractiveness, organizational attractiveness, applicant attraction, recruitment, job preferences*). We also checked the reference lists of previous literature reviews on CSR and employer branding (e.g., Gond et al. (2017); Jones et al. (2019); Lievens and Slaughter (2016)). We ultimately identified 35 articles (see Appendix 5.1). These show that previous research relied on numerous theories (signaling theory, social identity theory, the organizational justice mechanism, the person-organization fit mechanism, expectancy theory, etc.); the one most often invoked is signaling theory (in 24 out of 35 articles). Signaling theory is typically concerned with the use of signals to address information asymmetries between two parties (Rynes, 1989; Spence, 1973). Regarding the recruitment context, potential applicants usually have limited information on a company in the initial phase of the job-choice decision; consequently, they tend to use the information on hand as signals about organizational characteristics to reduce the initial information asymmetries between the recruiting firms and themselves (Baum & Kabst, 2013). Information asymmetry is at the center of signaling theory (Connelly, Certo, Ireland, & Reutzel, 2011). This problem is acute in emerging markets due to the absence or weakness of institutions (Zhao et al., 2014). While in developed markets job seekers can easily access quality information about firms, in emerging markets this information is more difficult to obtain. Thus, by sending out CSR information, firms can signal unobserved characteristics to applicants in emerging markets. However, the extant research often used theoretical mechanisms to justify hypotheses without directly testing the actual mediators—only a third of articles conducted direct tests of the mechanisms implied by the theories. Therefore, the field would be advanced by examining not only the “what” but also the “why,” with direct tests of the signal inferences that applicants draw from a firm’s CSR (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016).

No clear consensus on the operationalization of CSR exists. Numerous studies have either focused on one CSR dimension, mostly directed toward the environment or community, or integrated various CSR dimensions directed toward different stakeholders into a single construct, which potentially confounds their effects and causes fundamental uncertainty about the relationship between CSR and applicant-related outcomes (Jones et al., 2019; Zhao et al., 2022). Thus, in this study, we disentangle the impacts of different CSR dimensions. Carroll (1979) originally categorized four dimensions of CSR: economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary. His categorization has enjoyed wide popularity among scholars and has remained a leading paradigm of CSR in the field of management. Recently, Schwartz and Carroll (2003) revisited Carroll (1979) categorization and reduced the four dimensions to three, suggesting that the discretionary dimension would be best subsumed under the economic or ethical dimensions, based on different motivations for philanthropic activities. Following this work, we conceptualize CSR as encompassing three dimensions: (1) economic, referring to “any activity that is pursued with improving profits and/or share value in mind”; (2) legal, referring to the “firm’s responsiveness to legal expectations mandated and expected by society in the form of federal, state, and local jurisdictions, or through legal principles as developed in case law”; and (3) ethical, referring to “ethical responsibilities of business as expected by the general population and relevant stakeholders” (Schwartz & Carroll, 2003: 509-511).

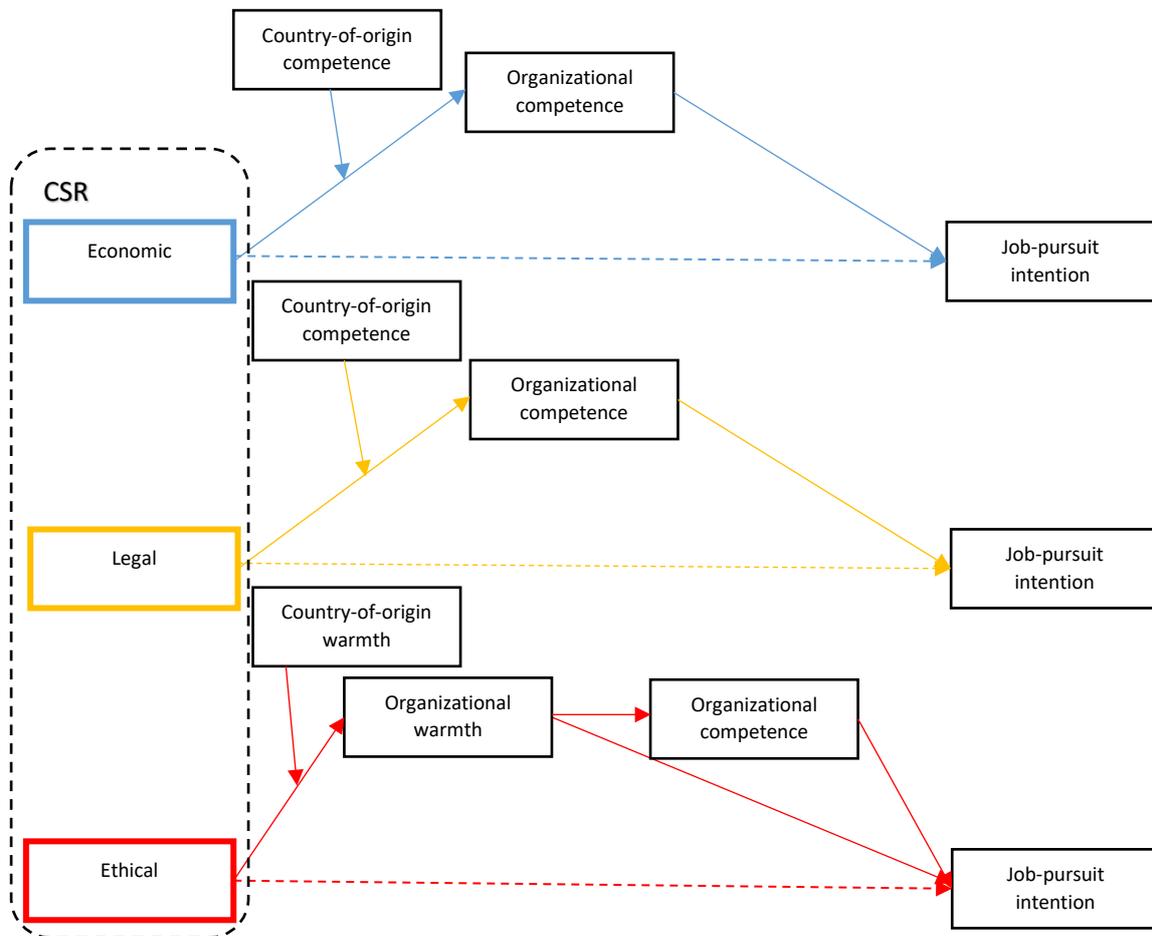
### **5.2.2. Signal-Based Mechanisms Explaining the Effect of CSR on Applicant Job-Pursuit Intention**

Research shows that CSR positively influences applicants through corporate reputation (Behrend, Baker, & Thompson, 2009; Duarte, Gomes, & das Neves, 2014; Wang, 2013; Zhang, Cao, Zhang, Liu, & Li, 2020). To obtain a more detailed understanding of this process, it is important to discuss a firm’s reputation *for* or *as* something, rather than its reputation *per se* (Foreman, Whetten, & Mackey, 2012). Fiske et al. (2002) indicate that individual general impressions map on to a large body of social perception research and that individuals form impressions of others on the basis of two general dimensions of warmth and competence. The perception of warmth concerns perceptions related to positive intent, including helpfulness, trustworthiness, friendliness, morality, and sincerity. The perception of competence, on the other hand, concerns perceptions related to ability, including skill, intelligence, prestigious, efficacy, innovative, and well-known (Cuddy et al., 2007, 2008). While we do not discount the possibility of other mechanisms, we focus on these two particular mechanisms for the following reasons. First, contrary to common belief that a large amount of information is needed to form a judgement of other individuals, researchers find convincing evidence that people tend to quickly judge others merely on the basis of the first impression of others’ motives and competence (Newman & Uleman, 1993). Second, researchers find that the dimensions of warmth and competence play a major role in various fields. As an example of consumer behavior, when assessing a brand, consumers make inferences about its warmth and competence, leading to a distinct emotion and behavior toward the brand (Cuddy et al., 2007). The same logic can be applied to the recruitment context. Applicants can develop a perception of an employer’s warmth and competence, similar to how consumers develop a perception of a brand’s warmth and competence (Carpentier et al., 2019). Uggerslev, Fassina, and Kraichy

(2012) document that applicants' perception of the recruiter's warmth and competence during an interview influences their perception of the hiring firm. Lievens and Slaughter (2016: 412) further suggest that perceived organizational warmth and competence can emerge as "meta-dimensions" of employer brand personality inferences. Third, these mechanisms reflect the value that job applicants seek from their employment experience—approval and status via affiliation with firms that are perceived as warm and competent (Carter & Highhouse, 2014). Different CSR dimensions are likely to generate different perceptions of warmth and competence, which will in turn affect the job-pursuit intention.

It is noteworthy that identical CSR signals may have differential effects, depending on the firm, i.e., the signal sender's other sources of warmth and competence perception. Applicants might also be driven by signals that firms can hardly influence. The effect of a firm's country-of-origin stereotype on the two dimensions of warmth and competence, for example, is not controlled by firms and may interact with CSR (Shea & Hawn, 2019). Thus, it is necessary to add a more nuanced perspective on the effect of CSR signaling. Drawing from the social psychology literature on stereotype fulfillment and violation (Cuddy et al., 2007), we assert that stereotypes create the foundation for evaluating specific behaviors or signals because firms are embedded in their original stereotypes. Given the negative or positive presumption of a firm's warmth and competence associated with its country of origin, a specific combination of different CSR dimensions may provide a stronger or weaker boost. Figure 5.1 demonstrates our research framework, which is further explained in the following sections.

Figure 5.1. Conceptual framework



### 5.3. Hypotheses

#### 5.3.1. Underlying Mechanism: Perceived Organizational Warmth and Competence as Mediators

Drawing on the idea that employer choices and workplaces serve as a social identity function conveying information about a person's social identity and self-image, Lievens and Highhouse (2003) propose that when choosing an employer, job applicants are concerned with not only basic instrumental or tangible benefits but also the symbolic image that is derived from the organizational affiliation. This can also be applied to applicants in emerging markets. Unlike their predecessors, the younger generations in emerging markets have witnessed a radical economic transition and renovation that is bringing in vast opportunities for foreign direct investment, modernization, and industrialization. Also, having experienced fewer hardships and inadequacies, they have started looking beyond simply making a living (Delaunay & Torrissi, 2012; Ready, Hill, & Conger, 2008; Roongrerngsuke & Liefoghe, 2013). Based on self-concept theory, Markus and Kitayama (1991) distinguish the independent and interdependent construal of self. The former is dominant in Western cultures, with the belief that distinct individuals are inherently separate, whereas the latter is more common in Eastern cultures, with the idea that identity also lies in one's social, familial, and professional relationships. Accordingly, applicants in emerging markets, especially those from Eastern cultures, will have

stronger intention to pursue jobs with firms that possess traits in accordance with their social-identity concerns. Such concerns broadly fall into two categories relevant to applicant attraction: (1) social-adjustment concerns relate to the need for approval from significant others; and (2) value-expression concerns relate to the need to express one's ideals and values (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). Therefore, working for a competent or warm organization would be desirable to applicants because it would help them to gain others' approval or express good values.

Relying on signaling theory, we propose that potential applicants derive signals of organizational warmth and competence from CSR. In other words, warmth and competence perceptions stemming from CSR play a mediating role in the relationship between CSR and applicants' job-pursuit intention. This raises the question of whether these two signal-based mechanisms are separate, accounting for the unique and incremental effects of CSR on job-pursuit intention (parallel mediation model), or whether they sequentially mediate the relationship between CSR and job-pursuit intention (sequential mediation model). Some scholars have highlighted the primacy of warmth over competence (Kenworthy & Tausch, 2008; Wojciszke, Bazinska, & Jaworski, 1998). For instance, Wojciszke et al. (1998) find evidence of a greater chronic accessibility for warmth than for competence traits, and a greater reliance on warmth than on competence in forming initial social judgments. In the context of our study, we emphasize warmth perception as the foundation of social relationships between applicants and potential employers. There is, moreover, evidence that warmth perception has halo effects, spilling over into competence judgments (Cuddy et al., 2008; Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007). Therefore, we assume that, in general, CSR affects applicants' job-pursuit intention through serial mediations, in which organizational warmth engenders organizational competence, which in turn influences applicants' attitudes and behaviors. Indeed, the sequential mediation model has the added advantage of incorporating multiple mechanisms into an integrative and comprehensive model as compared to the parallel model, thereby offering a more coherent explanation (Zhao et al., 2022). Nevertheless, we are interested not only in exploring the general mechanism, but also in disentangling the mechanisms for different CSR aspects.

Following Zhao et al. (2022), we propose that the three CSR dimensions will exert an influence on job-pursuit intention through different underlying mechanisms. Specifically, applicants use the economic and legal dimensions of CSR to infer organizational competence, and the ethical dimension of CSR to infer organizational warmth. Competence perception reflects perceived ability, including skill, prestigious, efficacy, and innovative (Fiske et al., 2007). Firms with high economic and legal performance are perceived as being capable of generating profits and adhering to the legal expectations mandated and expected by society, and hence as more competent. Meanwhile, warmth perception reflects perceived intent, including trustworthiness, sincerity, and morality (Fiske et al., 2007). By definition, the ethical dimension of CSR involves trustworthy and moral behaviors, beyond economic and legal obligations. Firms with high ethical performance are perceived to have good intentions and high moral principles, resulting in greater warmth and, by the spillover of warmth, greater competence.

*Hypothesis 1a:* Economic CSR increases applicants' job-pursuit intention through perceived organizational competence.

*Hypothesis 1b:* Legal CSR increases applicants' job-pursuit intention through perceived organizational competence.

*Hypothesis 1c:* Ethical CSR increases applicants' job-pursuit intention through perceived organizational warmth independent of perceived organizational competence and sequentially through perceived organizational warmth and competence.

### **5.3.2. Boundary Condition: Country of Origin as a Moderator**

Scholars have long known that a country of origin's image has a halo effect, influencing the image of a country's companies (Newbury, 2012). When applicants do not know a foreign firm, they may judge it based on their perception of its country of origin. From this perspective, the warmth and competence perceptions of unfamiliar foreign firms closely resemble those of the firm's country of origin. Thus, we are interested in the interaction between the social perception of a foreign firm based on its country of origin and its CSR. According to the social psychology literature on stereotype fulfillment and violation, social judgments fall into two major categories: (1) assimilation, which arises when people judge a target according to the held stereotype; and (2) contrast, which arises when people differentiate the target from the held stereotype (Cuddy et al., 2007; Newman & Uleman, 1993). We suggest that when a high-competence firm (from a high-competence country of origin) signals its economic and legal CSR, it provides little additional information and creates limited effects due to the assimilation to the held stereotype associated with the firm (a match between high-competence country of origin and high-competence CSR dimensions). Similarly, when a high-warmth firm (from a high-warmth country of origin) signals its ethical CSR, the effects are limited.

*Hypothesis 2a:* The indirect effect of economic CSR through perceived organizational competence is moderated by the perception of competence of the firm's country of origin such that the perception of competence of the firm's country of origin weakens the effect of economic CSR on perceived organizational competence.

*Hypothesis 2b:* The indirect effect of legal CSR through perceived organizational competence is moderated by the perception of competence of the firm's country of origin such that the perception of competence of the firm's country of origin weakens the effect of legal CSR on perceived organizational competence.

*Hypothesis 2c:* The indirect effect of ethical CSR through perceived organizational warmth is moderated by the perception of warmth of the firm's country of origin such that the perception of warmth of the firm's country of origin weakens the effect of ethical CSR on perceived organizational warmth.

### **5.3.3. The Configurality of CSR**

The previous hypotheses are predicated on the assumption that applicants combine information on various components of CSR in a simple additive manner, implying that "more is better" when it comes to CSR. Although an additive model may provide an accurate

approximation of the data, we suspect that it is oversimplified as it does not necessarily capture the actual cognitive process. It is, therefore, worthwhile for researchers to specify a more holistic, configural view of the examined inter-relationships between multiple CSR signals, the perception of the firm's country of origin, and applicants' job-pursuit intention. Specifically, we expect that the impacts of the three CSR dimensions and a firm's country of origin are contingent on different combinations of complex antecedent conditions and multiple alternative pathways.

Notwithstanding previous hypotheses, discrepancies between the independent net effects and the combinatorial effects may occur due to the asymmetric weighting of signals (Rothenhoefer, 2019). Previous research shows that people process warmth and competence signals asymmetrically, according to cue diagnosticity, which indicates that perceivers are reluctant to alter previous impressions unless the new cue is highly diagnostic (Fiske et al., 2007; Singh & Teoh, 2000; Skowronski & Carlston, 1987). Specifically, for warmth perception, positive behavior is perceived as controllable by social demands—not attributed to the other person's disposition—and hence is less diagnostic than negative behavior (Fiske et al., 2007). For instance, a person who is perceived as not warm will not be perceived as warm even after sometimes behaving in moral-sociable ways. The positive deviation is only attributed to situational demands, as even bad people can be nice when it matters to them, whereas negative deviation diminishes the presumption of warmth as it is attributed to the person's deceptive disposition. In contrast, for competence, positive (compared with negative) behavior is more diagnostic because it is not under immediate individual control. For example, a person who is perceived as incompetent will receive a boost in perceived competence when behaving competently because one cannot behave competently without challenging the previously held perception. A person who is perceived as highly competent, on the other hand, maintains the perceived competence even after a few incompetent behaviors (an absent-minded professor is an example).

We extend these findings to international recruitment: Applicants rarely rely on a single CSR-related signal but accumulate different signals, especially when firms are embedded in their original stereotypes. Indeed, scholars have found evidence that stakeholders' previous perception of firms influences the effectiveness of the firms' CSR (Elving, 2013; Kim & Lee, 2012). Specifically, because of the diagnosticity of positive information in competence judgment, we expect that a firm perceived as incompetent due to its low-competence country of origin can compensate with good economic, legal, or even ethical CSR (thanks to the spillover of warmth into competence). In contrast, since positive information is non-diagnostic in warmth judgment, firms that are perceived as not warm due to a low-warmth country of origin cannot compensate by simply engaging in good ethical CSR. This suggests that having a high-competence country of origin is not absolutely necessary (as a foreign firm can compensate for a relatively low-competence country of origin by delivering good CSR), while having a high-warmth country of origin is a necessary precondition for a favorable outcome.

*Hypothesis 3:* While high-competence country of origin is not absolutely necessary, high-warmth country of origin is a necessary precondition for high job-pursuit intention.

#### **5.4. Methodology**

Given the excessive reliance on survey-based methods and almost devoid of experimental methods in the extant micro-CSR literature, the field is prone to endogenous and causal issues (Gond et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2019; Zhao et al., 2022). Therefore, it is important to conduct experiments to establish the causal link between CSR and different outcomes by controlling the environment. To test our hypotheses, we conducted two experiments. In Study 1, we manipulated different CSR dimensions to examine the relationship between each CSR dimension and applicants' job-pursuit intention as well as the underlying mechanism through perceived organizational warmth and competence (Hypotheses 1a, 1b, 1c). In Study 2, we added information about the firm's country of origin to manipulate the warmth and competence of the firm and examine them as the boundary condition moderating the relationship between CSR and applicants' job-pursuit intention (Hypotheses 2a, 2b, 2c).

Besides the conventional symmetrical net effects estimated by regression analyses, we are also interested in investigating the complex asymmetric interdependencies among the multiple CSR aspects and perception of a firm's country of origin that underlie applicants' outcomes with fsQCA. fsQCA, which was introduced by Ragin (2000), supplements regression analysis with insights more closely aligned with the inherently complex realities of international recruiting in our study in the following ways: (1) asymmetry—the relationships are not treated as symmetric; (2) equifinality—different configurations of causal conditions (pathways) can lead to the same outcome; (3) causal complexity—focusing on the multiple combinations of causal conditions that give rise to an outcome of interest rather than on the independent net effects (Fainshmidt, Witt, Aguilera, & Verbeke, 2020; Skarmas, Leonidou, & Saridakis, 2014). Regression analysis can be used to study the interdependencies by creating interaction terms, but it becomes increasingly challenging to interpret when more than two interacting variables are in play.

Before conducting the two main studies, we performed a pilot study to examine the relevance of CSR to Vietnamese applicants, in comparison to other attributes of firms.

##### **5.4.1. Preliminary Test for the Relevance of CSR**

As a preliminary check of our basic premise, we investigated whether foreign firms would be better differentiated from each other on the basis of CSR than on the basis of instrumental attributes. A pilot study was conducted among 189 Vietnamese graduates, in which they were first asked to identify different foreign firms with which they were familiar from a list of 10 large foreign firms that are active in Vietnam; then, they were randomly assigned to one of the chosen firms and asked to rate their level of agreement with the statements regarding their perception of this firm on CSR and other instrumental attributes using a 5-point Likert scale. Four important instrumental attributes were identified from the recruitment literature: pay, career opportunities, working atmosphere, and work-life comfort. To identify the attributes that maximally discriminate among firms, we ran a discriminant function analysis. One discriminant function was significant and explained 65 percent of the variance between firms,  $\chi^2(45) = 87.95, p < .001$ , and CSR has the largest loading on the discriminant function (0.85), supporting the relevance of CSR.

## **5.4.2. Study 1**

### *5.4.2.1. Experimental Design*

We randomly assigned participants to one of the four conditions, which contained information about the firms' good economic CSR, good legal CSR, good ethical CSR, or no CSR at all (control condition), based on the descriptions established in prior studies (Evans & Davis, 2011; Zhang & Gowan, 2012). We also pre-tested the conditions to further refine the descriptions and ensure that they adequately portrayed different conditions and that there were no ambiguous descriptors (see Appendix 5.2). Four fictitious corporate LinkedIn job posts were created. Following previous studies by Jones, Willness, and Madey (2014); Shea and Hawn (2019), we developed a profile for a fictitious foreign medium-sized consumer goods manufacturer to preclude any potential emotional ties of respondents with an existing company. In addition, because respondents are unfamiliar with the fictitious firm, they rely more on the available signals from the study in their decision-making process (Han, 1989). The reason for selecting the consumer goods sector is that it is highly visible and accounts for 35 percent of material inputs used globally and 75 percent of municipal solid waste, meaning it has a high polluting potential and is subject to high pressure and scrutiny from stakeholders (EMF, 2013).

### *5.4.2.2. Sample*

We selected India and Vietnam to represent emerging markets because they are among the fastest-growing emerging markets in Asia and are attractive destinations for foreign investment (Jelili, 2020). In addition, while the literature on emerging markets mostly focuses on China, other emerging markets, such as India or the Next-Eleven countries, including Vietnam, warrant more attention in future research, as their labor markets have become tight with firms competing for scarce talent (Held & Bader, 2018). Specifically, Indian and Vietnamese graduates are the main focus of the study because they constitute the majority of the qualified workforce for foreign companies operating in these two countries. Participants were recruited from LinkedIn and crowdsourcing platforms (Mturk, Clickworker). These platforms are suitable for our study because a considerable proportion of participants are young and well-educated (ILO, 2018: 36). To control for the quality of responses, we implemented filter and validity-check questions in the survey, following the best practices suggested by Cobanoglu, Cavusoglu, and Turkatarhan (2021). Our final sample comprised  $n = 350$  participants (India  $n = 174$ , Vietnam  $n = 176$ ), 61.1 percent of whom were male. The average age was 29.15 years ( $SD = 6.55$ ), the average working experience was 5.38 years ( $SD = 4.84$ ), and 68 percent were seeking a job.

### *5.4.2.3. Procedure*

First, participants were asked to imagine themselves as applicants who had found a foreign firm that was recruiting junior managers. Next, they were asked to review the LinkedIn job post of that firm to obtain more information. In the job post, we provided the same brief description of the company, open positions offered, salary level, and compensation package obtained from real recruitment posts on LinkedIn, to eliminate any potential effects of extraneous factors on job-pursuit intention. Afterward, participants answered questions on manipulation checks, perceptions of the warmth and competence of the firm, job-pursuit

intention, and demographic characteristics. Moreover, we were able to infer serial mediation thanks to the temporal order in our experimental design.

#### *5.4.2.4. Measures*

*Warmth* ( $\alpha = .91$ ) and *competence* ( $\alpha = .92$ )

Following Cuddy et al. (2009); Fiske et al. (2002), we asked participants to indicate their beliefs about the firm's rating along the dimensions of warmth (warm, kind, good-natured, sincere) and competence (competent, professional, capable, competitive).

The internal consistency coefficients of items using Cronbach's alpha were provided in parentheses, with a threshold of .70 for acceptable reliability (Malhotra, 2012).

*Job-pursuit intention* ( $\alpha = .93$ )

We employed Highhouse, Lievens, and Sinar (2003) measure of job-pursuit intention. A sample item is "I would make this company one of my first choices as an employer."

All the above-mentioned constructs were measured using a 7-point Likert scale anchored from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) for a coherent structure throughout the survey.

#### *5.4.2.5. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)*

CFA was conducted to assess the study measures using AMOS26. The three-factor model fits the data well ( $\chi^2 = 196.65$ ,  $df = 62$ , CFI = .97, RMSEA = .06). In addition, sequential  $\chi^2$  difference tests showed that the three-factor model fits the data better than alternative models, confirming that the two mediators are distinct.

#### *5.4.2.6. Measurement Equivalence*

Following the procedures recommended by Vandenberg and Lance (2000), we conducted multigroup CFA for our three-factor measurement model to ensure that our measures exhibit an adequate equivalence across the two nation groups. The results showed that the model assessing metric invariance with equality constraint imposed on all factor loadings across the two nation groups ( $\chi^2 = 309.35$ ,  $df = 134$ , CFI = .95, RMSEA = .06) fits the data well relative to the model assessing configural invariance ( $\chi^2 = 305.37$ ,  $df = 130$ , CFI = .95, RMSEA = .06, insignificant chi-square differences  $\Delta \chi^2 = 3.98$  (4),  $p > .05$ ), which supports the measurement equivalence in our study. Thus, the pooling of the two national samples for subsequent hypothesis testing is justified.

#### *5.4.2.7. Manipulation Check*

Manipulation checks for scenario realism, participant engagement, and their perceptions of CSR conditions were carried out to ensure the validity of the experiment. Following Jones et al. (2014), we checked whether participants perceived the job post to be realistic using the item "The information from the company's LinkedIn job post looked like it was from a real job post" (M = 5.42, SD = 1.49) and whether they engaged in their roles as applicants by the two items "I really tried to imagine that I was looking for a job" (M = 5.39, SD = 1.55) and "If I were actually looking for a job, I'd like to read information from job posting platforms like I did in this study" (M = 5.63, SD = 1.42). Participants perceived the job post to be realistic and

were engaged in the applicant role; the mean values on a 7-point agreement scale all exceeded 5.

Regarding CSR conditions, one-way ANOVA and post-hoc tests showed that the responses to the manipulation check item about economic responsibility were significantly higher in the economic CSR condition than in the other three conditions ( $M_{\text{economic}} = 5.94$ ,  $M_{\text{legal}} = 5.17$ ,  $M_{\text{ethical}} = 5.13$ ,  $M_{\text{control}} = 4.28$ ,  $F(3, 346) = 16.54$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .13$ , Economic vs. Legal 95% CI [.23, 1.31],  $p < .01$ , Economic vs. Ethical 95% CI [.27, 1.36],  $p < .001$ , Economic vs. Control 95% CI [1.03, 2.29],  $p < .001$ ). Similarly, the manipulation check item about legal responsibility was rated significantly higher in the legal CSR condition than in the other three conditions ( $M_{\text{legal}} = 5.95$ ,  $M_{\text{economic}} = 5.24$ ,  $M_{\text{ethical}} = 5.37$ ,  $M_{\text{control}} = 4.70$ ,  $F(3, 346) = 12.89$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .10$ , Legal vs. Economic 95% CI [.22, 1.20],  $p < .01$ , Legal vs. Ethical 95% CI [.12, 1.05],  $p < .01$ , Legal vs. Control 95% CI [.70, 1.80],  $p < .001$ ). Last but not least, the manipulation check item about ethical responsibility was rated significantly higher in the ethical CSR condition than in the other three conditions ( $M_{\text{ethical}} = 5.82$ ,  $M_{\text{economic}} = 5.20$ ,  $M_{\text{legal}} = 5.25$ ,  $M_{\text{control}} = 4.46$ ,  $F(3, 346) = 12.29$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .10$ , Ethical vs. Economic 95% CI [.10, 1.16],  $p < .05$ , Ethical vs. Legal 95% CI [.07, 1.08],  $p < .05$ , Ethical vs. Control 95% CI [.76, 1.97],  $p < .001$ ). These results suggest that the manipulations worked as intended and created significant variance in the independent variables.

#### *5.4.2.8. Results*

We constructed sequential mediation models using Hayes PROCESS Macro Serial Mediation Model 6 (Hayes, 2017) to test the indirect effects of the presence or absence of CSR information (economic, legal, ethical) on job-pursuit intention through warmth and competence mediators while controlling for gender, age, and years of working experience. We followed the approach of Hayes and Preacher (2014) to estimate the indirect effect of a multicategorical independent variable X (three CSR aspects in our study). Rather than discarding groups to produce a dichotomous X and run multiple mediation analyses separately, Hayes and Preacher (2014)'s approach is the mathematical equivalent to analysis of (co)variance. It runs the analysis simultaneously across all values of X and helps to retain the information about how different groups differ from each other. We used dummy coding with the control condition as the reference group. For statistical inference about relative indirect effects (to the reference group), we used bootstrapping from 10,000 bootstrap samples along with bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals, following the recommendations of Hayes and Preacher (2014). Table 5.1 shows the results of the relative total, direct, indirect effects of the three CSR aspects on job-pursuit intention. The path coefficients are presented in Table 5.2.

**Table 5.1. Results of mediation analysis: Relative effects of the economic, legal, and ethical dimension of CSR on job-pursuit intention, through warmth and competence**

	Economic		Legal		Ethical	
	Effect (SE)	95% CI	Effect (SE)	95% CI	Effect (SE)	95% CI
Total effect	<b>.53</b> (.20)	[.13, .92]	<b>.61</b> (.19)	[.22, .99]	<b>.66</b> (.20)	[.27, 1.04]
Direct effect	.10 (.11)	[-.11, .32]	.17 (.10)	[-.04, .37]	.12 (.11)	[-.09, .33]
Indirect effect through warmth, independent of competence	.18 (.10)	[-.00, .38]	<b>.20</b> (.10)	[.02, .41]	<b>.29</b> (.10)	[.11, .50]
Indirect effect through competence, independent of warmth	<b>.12</b> (.06)	[.01, .25]	<b>.09</b> (.05)	[.01, .20]	.03 (.05)	[-.06, .13]
Indirect effect through warmth and competence <sup>1</sup>	.13 (.07)	[-.00, .29]	<b>.15</b> (.07)	[.02, .30]	<b>.21</b> (.07)	[.09, .38]

Note: <sup>1</sup> Competence as sequential mediator following warmth.

Effect estimate using 10,000 bootstrap samples along with the lower and upper bound of the 95% confidence interval (CI). Estimates with CI that do not cover 0 are statistically significant and bolded. Gender, age, and work experience were controlled.

**Table 5.2. Path coefficients from sequential mediation model**

Paths	Regression coefficient
→ Organizational warmth	
Economic CSR	.39
Legal CSR	.44*
Ethical CSR	.64**
→ Organizational competence	
Economic CSR	.28*
Legal CSR	.22*
Ethical CSR	.07
Organizational warmth	.79***
→ Job-pursuit intention	
Economic CSR	.10
Legal CSR	.17
Ethical CSR	.12
Organizational warmth	.46***
Organizational competence	.42***

Note: Gender, age, and work experience were controlled.

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

Economic CSR increases job-pursuit intention through higher organizational competence independent of organizational warmth ( $b = .12$ , 95% CI [.01, .25]). There are no

other significant indirect effects and no significant direct effects of economic CSR on job-pursuit intention. Therefore, Hypothesis 1a is supported.

Legal CSR increases job-pursuit intention through (1) higher organizational warmth independent of organizational competence ( $b = .20$ , 95% CI [.02, .41]), (2) higher organizational competence independent of organizational warmth ( $b = .09$ , 95% CI [.01, .20]), and (3) sequentially through organizational warmth and competence ( $b = .15$ , 95% CI [.02, .30]). There is no significant direct effect of legal CSR on job-pursuit intention. Therefore, Hypothesis 1b is partially supported.

Ethical CSR increases job-pursuit intention through higher organizational warmth independent of organizational competence ( $b = .29$ , 95% CI [.11, .50]) and sequentially through organizational warmth and competence ( $b = .21$ , 95% CI [.09, .38]). There are no other significant indirect effects and no significant direct effects of ethical CSR on job-pursuit intention. Therefore, Hypothesis 1c is supported.

### **5.4.3. Study 2**

#### *5.4.3.1. Experimental Design*

The study is based on a  $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$  cross-factorial design of economic CSR, legal CSR, ethical CSR, country-of-origin warmth, and country-of-origin competence, at the low and high levels of each. Since firms that perform well in one CSR dimension do not necessarily perform well in other dimensions (Greening & Turban, 2000; Zhang & Gowan, 2012), all values of each CSR dimension were fully crossed with the values of each of the others, creating every possible combination and allowing us to examine the main and interactive effects. The descriptions of the low and high levels of each CSR dimension were derived from Evans and Davis (2011); Zhang and Gowan (2012) (see Appendix 5.3). We pre-tested our manipulations on 30 participants to ensure that they worked as intended and created significant variance between the low and high levels for each CSR dimension. As of 2019, the eight countries of origin that we included—Singapore, Japan, China, South Korea, the USA, Germany, Indonesia, and the Philippines—are the top trading partners of India and Vietnam (WorldBank, 2019). These selected countries also represent a range in terms of population size, economic development, religious affiliation, and political experience. Furthermore, to engage the respondents and to ensure internal validity as well as a realistic setting, we added a logo and information on the founding year and employee demographics in each scenario.

#### *5.4.3.2. Sample*

Participants were recruited from LinkedIn and crowdsourcing platforms (Mturk, Clickworker). We implemented filter and validity-check questions in the survey to control for the quality of responses. Our final sample comprised  $n = 621$  participants (India  $n = 437$ , Vietnam  $n = 184$ ), 64.8 percent of whom were male. The average age was 28.34 years ( $SD = 6.10$ ), the average working experience was 4.59 years ( $SD = 4.61$ ), and 71.8 percent were seeking a job.

#### *5.4.3.3. Procedure*

Participants were asked to imagine themselves as applicants who had found some foreign firms that were currently recruiting and possessed the characteristics depicted in the scenarios. To eliminate the potential effects of extraneous factors on their job-pursuit intention, we instructed the participants to assume that all the firms and jobs were exactly the same except as described in the scenarios. Before delving into the scenarios, the participants were asked to rate the eight countries along the two warmth and competence dimensions based on the definitions provided by Cuddy et al. (2009), making up a 2x2 country stereotype matrix (i.e., high warmth and high competence; high warmth and low competence; low warmth and high competence; or low warmth and low competence) for each respondent. The country most associated with one of the four stereotypes (randomly assigned) was then piped into the following eight scenarios of all possible configural of the three CSR cues. We used participants' own perception to enhance the internal validity and avoid any potential influence beyond the warmth and competence continuums. In general, China (36%) was identified most frequently as a low-warmth and low-competence country. The US (31%) was identified most frequently as a high-warmth and high-competence country. Japan (20%) was identified most frequently as a low-warmth and high-competence country. The Philippines (27%) was identified most frequently as a high-warmth and low-competence country. In addition, the CSR cue order was varied across subjects, allowing us to control the order effects while maintaining consistency in cue display within subjects to minimize confusion. At the end of each scenario, the participants answered questions on their perceptions of warmth and competence of the firm, job-pursuit intention, and demographics.

#### *5.4.3.4. Measures*

The participants completed the same measures as in Study 1, except that we excluded one item for each scale to shorten the questionnaire and bring more attention to the questions as well as to avoid participant overloading ( $\alpha_{\text{warmth}} = .92$ ;  $\alpha_{\text{competence}} = .91$ ;  $\alpha_{\text{job-pursuit intention}} = .95$ ). We carefully verified the reliability of the scale by checking how  $\alpha$  varies if the item is deleted in the pretest.

#### *5.4.3.5. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)*

CFA was conducted to assess the study measures. The three-factor model fits the data well ( $\chi^2 = 72.31$ ,  $df = 32$ , CFI = .99, RMSEA = .05). In addition, sequential  $\chi^2$  difference tests showed that the three-factor model fits the data better than alternative models, which confirmed that the two mediators are distinct.

#### *5.4.3.6. Measurement Equivalence*

We conducted multigroup CFA for our three-factor measurement model to ensure that our measures exhibited an adequate equivalence across the two nation groups. The results showed that the model assessing metric invariance with the equality constraint imposed on all factor loadings across the two nation groups ( $\chi^2 = 150.42$ ,  $df = 71$ , CFI = .99, RMSEA = .05) fits the data well relative to the model assessing configural invariance ( $\chi^2 = 144.55$ ,  $df = 64$ , CFI = .99, RMSEA = .05, insignificant chi-square differences  $\Delta \chi^2 = 5.87$  (7),  $p > .05$ ), which

supports measurement equivalence in our study. Thus, the pooling of the two national samples for subsequent hypothesis testing is justified.

#### *5.4.3.7. Results*

Building on Study 1, in Study 2 we continued to construct the previous sequential mediation models by adding (1) the interaction effect of economic CSR and country-of-origin competence on organizational competence, (2) the interaction effect of legal CSR and country-of-origin competence on organizational competence, and (3) the interaction effect of ethical CSR and country-of-origin warmth on organizational warmth to test the moderated mediation effects. Before expanding upon the moderated mediation effects, the interaction components are visualized to better understand the patterns (see Figure 5.2). Figure 5.2 shows that when the country of origin is perceived as high competence, the relationship between economic and legal CSR and organizational competence becomes weaker (less positive). The interaction terms, however, are not significant (economic CSR x country-of-origin competence:  $b = -.09$ ,  $p > .10$ ; legal CSR x country-of-origin competence:  $b = -.08$ ,  $p > .10$ ); that is, the effects of economic and legal CSR on organizational competence are not different between firms from a high-competence country of origin and those from a low-competence country of origin. Consequently, the indirect effects of economic and legal CSR on job-pursuit intention through organizational competence are not moderated by country-of-origin competence, with the indices of moderated mediation (difference between conditional indirect effects) being not statistically different from zero (economic CSR:  $-.05$ , 95% CI  $[-.17, .06]$ ; legal CSR:  $-.05$ , 95% CI  $[-.16, .06]$ ) and thus providing no support for Hypotheses 2a and 2b. For economic CSR, the conditional indirect effects when country of origin is perceived as low competence ( $b = .28$ , 95% CI  $[.20, .36]$ ) and when country of origin is perceived as high competence ( $b = .23$ , 95% CI  $[.14, .31]$ ) are both significantly positive and they are not significantly different from each other. For legal CSR, the conditional indirect effect when country of origin is perceived as low competence is significantly positive ( $b = .10$ , 95% CI  $[.03, .17]$ ), while the conditional indirect effect when country of origin is perceived as high competence is not significant ( $b = .05$ , 95% CI  $[-.03, .13]$ ), and they are not significantly different from each other.

Figure 5.2 also shows that the relationship between ethical CSR and organizational warmth remains regardless of the perceived country-of-origin warmth. Indeed, the interaction term is not significant ( $b = .01$ ,  $p > .10$ ). Consequently, the indirect effect of ethical CSR on job-pursuit intention through organizational warmth is not moderated by country-of-origin warmth, with the index of moderated mediation not being statistically different from zero ( $.01$ , 95% CI  $[-.14, .15]$ ). The conditional indirect effects when country of origin is perceived as low warmth ( $b = .31$ , 95% CI  $[.19, .43]$ ) and when country of origin is perceived as high warmth ( $b = .31$ , 95% CI  $[.21, .42]$ ) are both significantly positive, and they are not significantly different from each other. Therefore, Hypothesis 2c is not supported.

Although it is not covered in our hypotheses, we also checked whether there is an indirect effect of legal CSR on job-pursuit intention through organizational warmth, as Study 1 provides evidence that legal CSR is associated with higher job-pursuit intention through organizational warmth. The conditional indirect effect when country of origin is perceived as

low warmth is significantly positive ( $b = .14$ , 95% CI [.03, .25]), while the conditional indirect effect when country of origin is perceived as high warmth is not significant ( $b = .06$ , 95% CI [-.04, .17]), and they are not significantly different from each other, providing no support for the moderated mediation effect. Figure 5.3 illustrates our findings on the moderated mediation effects.

**Figure 5.2. Interactions between CSR and country-of-origin warmth and country-of-origin competence**

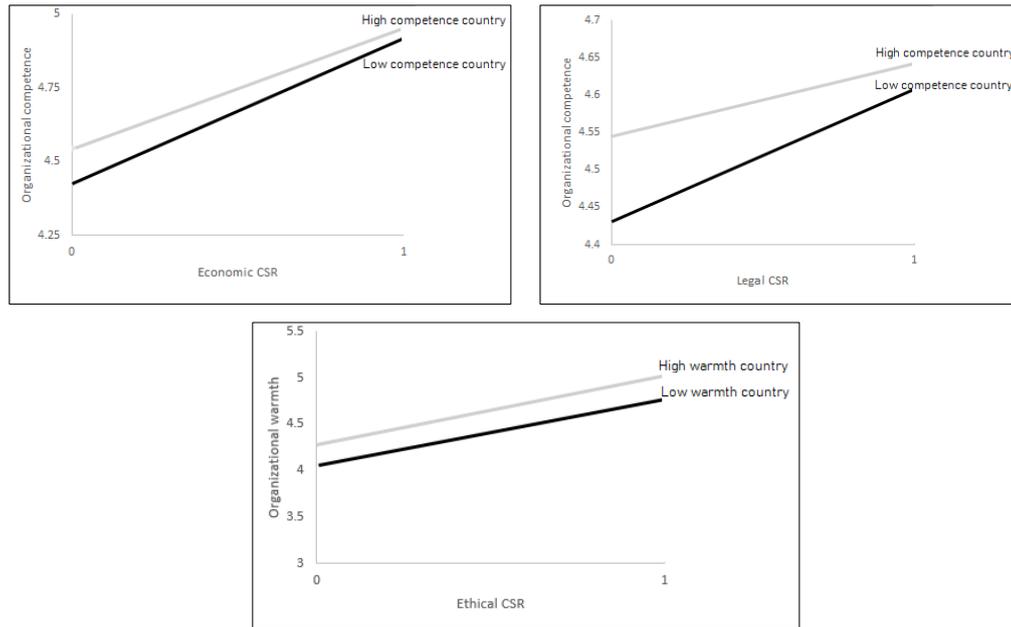
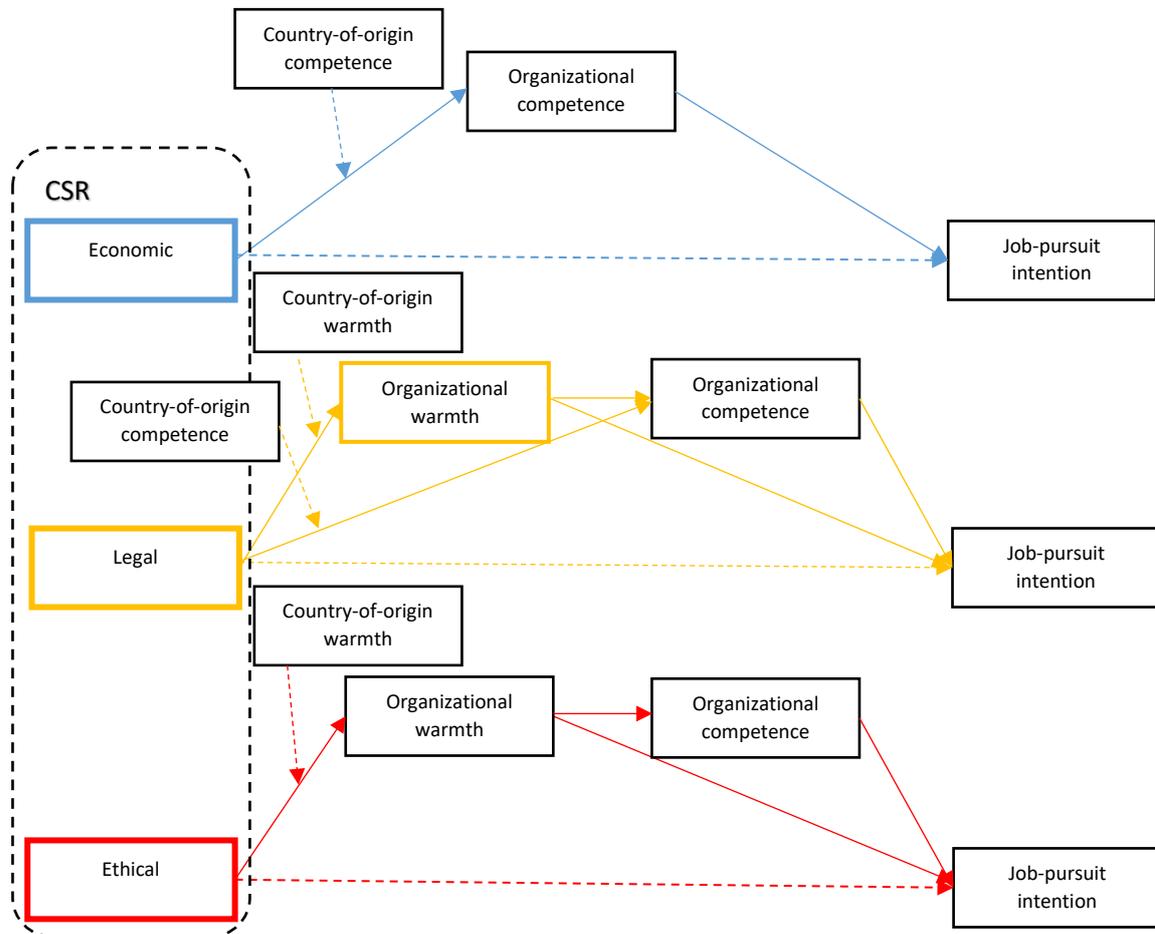


Figure 5.3. Results from the tests of moderated mediation models



In a final step, fsQCA was applied to specify a more holistic, configural picture of the examined inter-relationships between multiple CSR signals, perception of a firm's country of origin, and applicants' job-pursuit intentions, assuming asymmetric relationships rather than symmetrical net effects. Unlike regression-based methods treating causal conditions as independent variables with linear and additive effects on the outcome, fsQCA considers cases as configurations of conditions, allowing us to distinguish between necessary and sufficient conditions for an outcome (Ragin, 2009). A necessary condition is "a condition that must be present for the outcome to occur, but its presence does not guarantee that occurrence" (Ragin, 2009: 21). On the other hand, a sufficient condition is one that always leads to the given outcome, but it may not be the only condition that leads to this outcome. In set notation, a necessary condition can be explained as a superset of the outcome, whereas sufficient conditions are subsets of the outcome (Ragin, 2009).

In other words, we tried to estimate the alternative antecedent conditions that led to the presence of a high job-pursuit intention outcome with fsQCA. To do so, we first needed to calibrate our data into sets that were groups of values representing the degree of membership in a specific category (i.e., ranging from 0 to 1, in which 1 indicates "full membership," 0

signifies “full non-membership,” and 0.5 denotes neither membership nor non-membership—a crossover point). Following Palacios-Marques, Roig-Dobon, and Comeig (2017); Russo and Confente (2019); Verissimo (2016), since we used 7-point Likert scales to measure job-pursuit intention in our study, the endpoints of the scale served as the two qualitative anchors for the calibration of full membership (value 7) and full non-membership (value 1). The crossover point is calculated by observing the sample distribution as the median value (value 5). This approach has been proven to be better than the midpoint calibration in survey-based data derived from individual self-reported perceptions, particularly with known tendencies toward positive values on Likert scales (Braunscheidel, Suresh, & Boisnier, 2010; McCarty & Shrum, 2000). For the analysis, we used the fsQCA 3.0 software, and the output provided three types of solutions (i.e., causal conditions) that led to the outcome: complex, parsimonious, and intermediate. The difference between these solution types is the extent to which they included logical remainders in the analysis (Ragin, 2009). In particular, the complex solution made no simplifying assumptions, thus it was the most appropriate in this study. This solution is highly recommended when the number of causal antecedent conditions is not large (Elliott, 2013). To derive final solutions, we assigned a cutoff consistency score, i.e., the degree to which the solution terms (or causal conditions) and the general solution are subsets of the outcome, of 0.80, as recommended by Ragin (2000). Researchers also assess the coverage measure, which indicates how much of the outcome is covered or explained by each solution term and by the solution as a whole.

Table 5.3 shows the derived complex solutions, demonstrating the alternative causal recipes that lead to high job-pursuit intention. Our solution is informative with a solution consistency higher than .74 and solution coverage between .25 and .65, as recommended by Ragin (2009).

**Table 5.3. Main configurations for job-pursuit intention**

Configurations	Solutions						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Country-of-origin warmth	●	●	●				
Country-of-origin competence	⊗	⊗	⊗	●	●	●	
Economic CSR	●			●	●		●
Legal CSR		●		●		●	●
Ethical CSR			●		●	●	●
Consistency	.88	.87	.88	.84	.85	.86	.70
Raw coverage	.24	.24	.24	.22	.23	.23	.17
Unique coverage	.05	.05	.05	.05	.05	.05	.04
Solution coverage	.66						
Solution consistency	.76						

Note. Black circles (●) indicate the presence of a condition. Circle with a cross (⊗) indicate its absence. Blank cells indicate the “do not care” condition, meaning that a specific condition’s presence/absence does not matter.

Solutions 1, 2, and 3 reflect that firms from high-warmth and low-competence countries of origin can still attract applicants if they engage in good economic, legal, or ethical CSR

(consistency = [.87, .88], coverage = .24), showing that a high-competence country of origin is not a necessary condition for high job-pursuit intention.

Solutions 4, 5, and 6 provide that a combination of a high-competence country of origin and two good CSR aspects (economic and legal CSR, economic and ethical CSR, or legal and ethical CSR) (consistency = [.84, .86], coverage = [.22, .23]) results in high job-pursuit intention, whereby it does not matter whether the firm comes from a high-warmth country of origin, suggesting that a high-warmth country of origin is not a necessary condition either.

Similarly, solution 7 indicates that a combination of all three CSR dimensions (economic, legal, and ethical CSR) (consistency = .70, coverage = .17) is sufficient for high job-pursuit intention regardless of the firm's country of origin. As a result, we can conclude that neither a high-competence nor a high-warmth country of origin is a necessary precondition for high job-pursuit intention. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 is partially supported.

## **5.5. Discussion**

### **5.5.1. General Discussion**

While a growing number of studies show that CSR can help firms gain an advantage in the so-called “war for talent,” the underlying mechanisms and contingency factors that explain why and when different aspects of CSR influence job applicants remain unclear. This study examined how three CSR aspects (economic, legal, and ethical CSR) relate to the two elementary dimensions of social perception—warmth and competence—and how these two microfoundations mediate and moderate the relationship between CSR and the applicant's job-pursuit intention. In Study 1, we manipulated the presence of the three CSR aspects on LinkedIn job posts. The results provide evidence of heterogeneous underlying mechanisms among the three different CSR aspects, which lends support to Zhao et al. (2022) call for a more fine-grained analysis of different aspects of CSR. Specifically, a firm whose job post contained economic CSR information was judged to have a higher organizational competence than one whose job post contained no CSR information; this in turn led to higher job-pursuit intention. The firm whose job post contained ethical CSR information, on the other hand, was judged to be higher in organizational warmth than one whose job post contained no CSR information. Due to the primary and spillover effect of warmth, it was also judged to be higher in organizational competence, leading to higher job-pursuit intention. Unlike the other two dimensions, the firm whose job post contained legal CSR information was judged to be higher in both organizational warmth and competence than the one whose job post contained no CSR information. This raises an intriguing possibility: legal CSR connotes not only organizational competence but also organizational warmth. This might be due to the special context of emerging markets with pervasive institutional voids and weak law enforcement, allowing firms to easily escape their legal responsibilities or even take advantage of weak legal standards (Tashman et al., 2019; Zhao et al., 2014). The result, therefore, should be interpreted in that context: When applicants in emerging markets know that a firm actively complies with all applicable laws and regulations despite the weak enforcement, this knowledge might engender feelings of good intention and trustworthiness about the firm beyond feelings of ability, hence

the higher warmth perception. Research is needed to better understand the influence of contexts on social perception.

In Study 1, we established the mediation mechanisms through which CSR affects applicants' job-pursuit intention, but questions about the boundary conditions remained. Could other sources of warmth and competence moderate the relationship? Indeed, applicants have other information about a firm when making application decisions, e.g., about the brand or country of origin. Extending this logic, we incorporated a macro-level factor and examined whether the mediation effects are moderated by the warmth and competence of a firm's country of origin in Study 2. Although we did not find support for any of the moderated mediation effects, it is notable that legal CSR was not significantly associated with higher job-pursuit intention through organizational warmth and competence for firms from high-warmth and high-competence countries of origin. These results demonstrate that the signals stemming from the firm's country of origin are not completely dominated by the signals stemming from the firm, and that the signals stemming from both levels are embedded in some ways, which deserves further investigation.

Therefore, after examining the underlying mechanisms and conditions under which CSR influences job applicants for each CSR dimension, we went a step further to explore the interactions between all the three CSR dimensions and a firm's country of origin in a configural manner. The results from the fsQCA added nuance to the moderated mediation effects observed in the regression-based conditional process analysis. We found that neither a high-competence nor a high-warmth country of origin is absolutely necessary for high job-pursuit intention. A combination of good CSR aspects is able to compensate for a relatively low-warmth and low-competence country of origin of a firm. Thus, when evaluating potential employers, there seems to be a balance between the roles of CSR and the firm's country of origin, creating more room for CSR information to play a role.

Although we did not find support for our hypothesis that having a high-warmth country of origin is a necessary precondition for a favorable outcome, there is still a difference between country-of-origin warmth and competence, which is consistent with prior research that individuals process warmth and competence information asymmetrically (Fiske et al., 2007; Singh & Teoh, 2000; Skowronski & Carlston, 1987). Due to the diagnosticity of positive information in competence judgment, even one good CSR aspect (economic, legal, or ethical CSR) is able to compensate for a low-competence country of origin. On the other hand, since positive information is non-diagnostic in warmth judgment, one good CSR aspect is not sufficient to compensate for a low-warmth country of origin, and a combination of at least two good CSR aspects is required.

### **5.5.2. Theoretical Contributions**

Our study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, drawing on signaling theory, we uncover the underlying mechanisms and boundary conditions under which CSR affects job-pursuit intention at the individual level of analysis. There is a significant research gap in this area. According to Aguinis and Glavas (2012), while various outcomes of CSR have

long been studied, only 4 percent of the empirical work examined these outcomes at the individual level. We help narrow this research gap by extending the micro-CSR perspective and bringing the notion of warmth and competence perception, drawn from the social psychology research, to clarify how firms can signal their unobservable characteristics to potential employees via CSR.

Another important contribution lies in disentangling the effects of different CSR dimensions, namely economic, legal, and ethical CSR. Since CSR is conceptually considered as an umbrella construct, previous studies have either focused on one CSR dimension, directed toward a specific stakeholder, or integrated various CSR dimensions, directed toward different stakeholders, into a single construct. This potentially confounds their effects and causes fundamental uncertainty about the relationship between CSR and applicant-related outcomes (Jones et al., 2019; Zhao et al., 2022). Our work contributes to the signal-based theory of CSR and recruitment: Different CSR aspects appear to send different signals, which also depend on the context. For instance, unlike economic and ethical CSR, legal CSR connotes both organizational competence and warmth in the special context of emerging markets with pervasive institutional voids and weak law enforcement. It becomes evident that the signaling mechanisms through which CSR influences applicants are more accurately captured by a fine-grained conceptualization of CSR and an adequate reflection of the context.

The study also expands the horizons of individual-focused CSR research and contributes to the international management literature by examining the interaction between CSR and a firm's country of origin. We show that similar to individuals, firms can be subject to stereotypes on account of the warmth and competence stereotypes of their country of origin. Such an international perspective on CSR is missing from the extant literature, as the most frequently studied moderators so far are individual-level variables (Gond et al., 2017). Jones et al. (2019), nevertheless, underlined that although the vast majority of extant individual-focused CSR research is micro in nature, "the scientific study of these phenomena is by no means restricted to the individual level" (p. 302). Our study responds to this call by demonstrating how meso-level (firm's CSR) and macro-level (firm's country of origin) factors combine to shape micro-level applicant outcomes that cannot be adequately explained by factors at any isolated level of analysis.

Finally, attention to the simultaneous effects of signals at different levels offers a novel configurational perspective on the signal-based mechanisms of CSR. Although signaling theory has advanced our understanding of how individuals cope with information asymmetry, little is known about how different signals interact with one another; Connelly et al. (2011: 60) remark that "an important consideration that has received limited scholarly attention is how receivers meaningfully aggregate signals." Study 2 provides evidence that applicants do not combine various signals in a simple additive manner, but the process is configurational and characterized by equifinality, implying the presence of multiple configurations of causal conditions leading to high job-pursuit intention.

### **5.5.3. Methodological Contributions**

By combining experiments, regression-based conditional process analysis, and fsQCA, we illustrate how the three methods provide complementary ways to understand the complex causal pathways leading to higher applicants' job-pursuit intention in international recruitment. Specifically, experiments have the highest explanatory power and help establish direct causality through an interventionist logic by controlling for other extraneous factors that are difficult to isolate in the field settings (Zellmer-Bruhn et al., 2016). Regression-based conditional process analysis allows us to clearly picture the underlying mechanisms explaining the effect of each CSR dimension on applicants through perceived organizational warmth and competence as well as how these mechanisms are moderated by country-of-origin warmth and competence. fsQCA complements this by enabling us to explore the interactions between all the three CSR dimensions and country-of-origin warmth and competence in a configural manner, thereby uncovering multiple configurations of causal pathways that can lead to success through a configurational approach (Skarmeas et al., 2014). Further, by adding a macro-level factor—a firm's country of origin—and examining the interplay between it and the firm's CSR, we embrace the inherently complex and multilevel nature of international business and respond to the call for more multilevel work to bridge the gap across levels in micro studies of CSR (Fainshmidt et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2019).

### **5.5.4. Managerial Implications**

Our research contributes to the international human resource management literature by studying applicants in emerging markets, particularly India and Vietnam. Previous research has been criticized for its primary focus on applicants from Western countries and on how CSR influences applicants from these countries (Allen & Vardaman, 2017). The growing importance of emerging markets makes it imperative to address this gap (Aharoni, 2014).

Our findings provide several managerial implications. Through the experiments in our study, we are able to provide a direct recommendation to managers of foreign firms on engaging in CSR to attract applicants in emerging markets. Different CSR dimensions connote different feelings (warmth, competence, or both warmth and competence). Critically, while foreign firms cannot change their country of origin and their country image cannot be improved in a short time, they can develop suitable strategies acknowledging their country of origin's effect and better allocate their limited resources. For instance, for firms from low-competence countries of origin, engaging in economic, legal, or ethical CSR may help boost perceived competence. For firms from low-warmth countries of origin, a combination of good legal and ethical CSR might be a strategy worth pursuing. Interestingly, having both low-competence and low-warmth countries of origin is not a complete dead end, as firms can overcome these constraints by engaging in all three CSR dimensions. Last but not least, for firms with high-warmth and high-competence countries of origin, engaging in economic and ethical CSR still confers benefits as the conditional indirect effects of these CSR dimensions on applicants' job-pursuit intention through organizational competence and warmth are significantly positive even when the country of origin is perceived as high warmth and high competence.

### **5.5.5. Limitations and Future Research**

The paper has certain limitations that may be overcome by future research. First, although the choice of experimental method is one of the study's strengths, our scenarios could not reflect all possible information applicants may acquire during their job search. Future research could strengthen and extend our findings to field settings, assessing applicants' job-pursuit intentions and perceptions about real firms. Second, we focused on the effects of the presence or absence of good CSR. Future research may take a step further by distinguishing between CSR and CSI (corporate social irresponsibility), as Lange and Washburn (2012) show that CRI is a distinct construct that elicits different interpretations from CSR and merits further consideration. Further, social psychology researchers have found evidence that individuals process positive-negative information asymmetrically with a negativity bias, suggesting the higher diagnostic value of negative information (Rothenhoefer, 2019; Skowronski & Carlston, 1987). Third, we did not examine the moderating effects of applicants' individual differences. For example, applicants' social-identity concerns, including social-adjustment and value-expression concerns, could provide additional insights into the intention to pursue jobs with competent or warm organizations. Therefore, it would be fruitful to measure applicants' social-identity concerns in future research to examine their moderating effects on recruitment outcomes. Finally, we did not take industry differences into account. The attractiveness of foreign firms may vary widely between different industries (Holtbrügge & Kreppel, 2015; Laroche, Papadopoulos, Heslop, & Murali, 2005). For instance, Chinese home appliance producers enjoy a better reputation than Chinese carmakers. Future research could extend our findings and provide additional insights by adding the concept of industry stereotypes, in addition to country of origin.

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*Study 3: Understanding the Relevance of CSR for Recruiting in Emerging Markets: An Examination of the Underlying Mechanisms and the Interplay between the Three Dimensions of CSR and the Foreign Firm's Country of Origin*

*Appendix*

*Appendix 5.1. Overview of studies examining the impact of CSR on prospective employees and job applicants (the number of studies in each category is given in parentheses)*

Underlying mechanisms <sup>1</sup>		
	Signaling mechanism (24)	Aiman-Smith et al. (2001); Albinger and Freeman (2000); Alniacik, Alniacik, and Genc (2011); Backhaus, Stone, and Heiner (2002); Bauer and AimanSmith (1996); <b>Behrend et al. (2009)</b> [corporate reputation]; Belinda, Westerman, and Bergman (2018); Burbano (2016); <b>Duarte et al. (2014)</b> [corporate image]; Evans and Davis (2011); Greening and Turban (2000); Guerci, Montanari, Scapolan, and Epifanio (2016); Gully, Phillips, Castellano, Han, and Kim (2013); Hong and Kim (2017); <b>Jones et al. (2014)</b> [anticipated pride, perceived value fit, expected treatment]; Jones, Willness, and Heller (2016); Lin, Tsai, Joe, and Chiu (2012); Luce, Barber, and Hillman (2001); Sen, Bhattacharya, and Korschun (2006); Tsai, Joe, Lin, and Wang (2014); Turban and Greening (1997); <b>Wang (2013)</b> [corporate reputation, job advancement prospects]; Waples and Brachle (2020); <b>Zhang et al. (2020)</b> [corporate reputation]
	Social identity mechanism (7)	Berens, Riel, and van Rekom (2007); Duarte et al. (2014); Evans and Davis (2011); Greening and Turban (2000); Klimkiewicz and Oltra (2017); Sen et al. (2006); Turban and Greening (1997)
	Person-organization fit mechanism (3)	<b>Gully et al. (2013)</b> ; <b>Kim and Park (2011)</b> [perceived PO fit]; Zhang and Gowan (2012)
	Organizational justice mechanism (2)	<b>Joo, Moon, and Choi (2016)</b> [perceived organizational justice]; Rupp, Shao, Thornton, and Skarlicki (2013)
	Expectancy mechanism (2)	Lin et al. (2012); Wang (2013)
	Others (5): cue consistency mechanism; multimotive CSR framework; configural cue processing mechanism; relational models theory; theory of planned behavior	<b>Agnihotri and Bhattacharya (2021)</b> [CSR credibility]; <b>Bridoux, Stofberg, and Den Hartog (2016)</b> [corporate trust]; Zhang and Gowan (2012); Sorenson, Mattingly, and Lee (2010); Dawkins et al. (2016)
Boundary conditions		
Individual level	Personal beliefs about CSR importance (5)	Bauer and AimanSmith (1996); Behrend et al. (2009) [personal environmental stance]; Berens et al. (2007) [personal relevance of CSR information]; Evans and Davis (2011) [CSR education]; Tsai et al. (2014) [socio-environmental consciousness]
	Moral values (5)	Bridoux et al. (2016); Evans and Davis (2011) [other-orientation]; Greening and Turban (2000) [environmental values]; Gully et al. (2013) [desire to have a significant impact through work]; Rupp et al. (2013) [first-party distributive justice, moral identity]
	Socio-demographics (4)	Albinger and Freeman (2000) [levels of job choices]; Backhaus et al. (2002); Greening and Turban (2000) [gender]; Dawkins et al. (2016) [culture]
	Attributions of CSR motives (2)	Rupp et al. (2013); Sen et al. (2006)
Meso level	Personality traits (1)	Zhang and Gowan (2012) [Machiavellianism vs. Utilitarianism]
	CEO activism (1)	Agnihotri and Bhattacharya (2021)
	Corporate reputation and ability (2)	Guerci et al. (2016); Kim and Park (2011)
	Pay level (1)	Waples and Brachle (2020)
	Presentation medium— websites/social media (1)	Belinda et al. (2018)
Macro level	Firm's country of origin (1)	Hong and Kim (2017)

<sup>1</sup> Studies that directly tested the mechanisms implied by theories are in bold, and the actual mediators are provided in square brackets.

## Appendix 5.2. Manipulations in Experiment 1

**Economic CSR condition:** At ABR, we are committed to the long-term economic growth of our company. We pride ourselves on being an industry leader with good financial performance. Our business is growing impressively in terms of revenue, earnings, and number of employees. Often, we report income that exceeds budget expectations, whereas actual costs are below expectations. We outperformed the broader stock market, delivering a 33 percent average return to shareholders over the last three years.

**Legal CSR condition:** At ABR, we are committed to proactively fulfilling our legal responsibilities. We pride ourselves on being an industry leader with a good legal reputation (no record of lawsuits, investigations, or fines). We comply with all laws and regulations and also actively cooperate with local governments to help them improve industry standards.

**Ethical CSR condition:** At ABR, we are committed to the most ethical business practices and morality. We pride ourselves on being an industry leader with a good ethical reputation for living up to moral principles and codes of conduct. We have taken an active stand against the “sweatshop“ conditions that often prevail in overseas facilities in developing countries and are far ahead of our competitors in providing fair and equal treatment for our overseas workers. We are also dedicated to environmental protection and help address community needs.

### Junior Manager

ABR · India (On-site) · 4 weeks ago · 18 applicants

Full-time · Associate

201-500 employees

Actively recruiting

[Apply](#) [Save](#)

**About Us**

ABR is a global manufacturer of household and professional products for cleaning and hygiene. We undertake manufacturing at various locations in the world, and hire employees from multiple countries.

At ABR, we are committed to **the most ethical business practices and morality**. We pride ourselves on being an industry leader with good ethical reputation for living up to moral principles and codes of conduct. We have taken an active stand against the „sweatshop“ conditions that often prevail in overseas facilities in developing countries and are far ahead of our competitors in providing fair and equal treatment for our overseas workers. We are also dedicated to environment protection and help address community needs.

We are recruiting Junior Managers in various fields, including Product Management, Marketing, Sales, Finance and Accounting, HR, and R&D for our subsidiary in India.

Our compensation package is near the top for the industry with highly competitive average salary and starting salaries and comprehensive benefits.

**Requirements**

- Excellent interpersonal skills
- Ability to handle confidential and sensitive matters with discretion, responsibly
- Willingness to learn new skills with a 'Can Do' positive attitude
- Thrive in a multi-tasking environment, organized, and adjust priorities on the fly

About the company

**ABR** ABR  
3,514 followers [+ Follow](#)

Consumer Goods · 201-500 employees · 148 on LinkedIn

We are a manufacturer of household and professional products for cleaning and hygiene. [...show more](#)

*Appendix 5.3. Manipulations in Experiment 2*

	Economic CSR	Legal CSR	Ethical CSR
Low	The company's business seems stagnant, with only marginal efforts to reduce costs or generate new revenue.	The company passively complies with laws and regulations. It has opportunistically taken advantage of the relatively weak legal standards in developing host countries and has recently been under a couple of investigations for its business practices.	The company has codes of conduct that are carried out in minimum compliance with ethical norms and moral principles for some but not all of its business units. It only addresses ethical issues when its activities are made public.
High	The company is profitable, and its business is growing steadily, with constant efforts to increase revenue and reduce costs.	The company not only complies with all applicable laws and regulations but also actively cooperates with local governments to help them improve industry standards and assists Congress in legislating for the public good.	The company has a good reputation for being an ethical company. It treats overseas employees fairly and equally, is dedicated to environmental protection, and helps address community needs in all countries where it operates.

## **6. Conclusions**

### **6.1. Main Findings and Contributions**

The thesis constitutes three separate studies on the role of CSR in international recruitment for MNEs.

Study 1 employed a web-based experiment using realistic recruitment webpages. Specifically, participants in the study had to actively look for CSR information on the MNEs' websites. This approach improves upon previous studies in which researchers used website printouts and directly provided information on a firm's CSR activities to participants. Only real, interactive websites allow researchers to track respondents' behaviors and explore applicants' willingness to search for CSR information of a firm, which is a determinant of their awareness of the firm's CSR activities. Furthermore, websites which require the respondent to search for information themselves create a more realistic setting, thus enhancing the validity of the experiment.

Study 2 further investigated the relevance of CSR relative to other job and organizational attributes in IHRM by applying cross-national choice-based conjoint analysis with its decompositional approach. The decompositional approach has been found to provide more accurate results than the compositional approach when studying decision-making, understanding attribute trade-offs, and calibrating attribute importance (Baum & Kabst, 2013; Luce & Tukey, 1964; Ronda, Abril, & Valor, 2021). In particular, the choice tasks in the choice-based conjoint analysis closely mimic real behavior, resulting in greater external validity.

Study 3 explored the underlying mechanisms by which different CSR dimensions influence applicants' job-pursuit intentions, as well as the optimal CSR configurations leading to high job-pursuit intention for MNEs according to their origins. Two experiments were conducted. Experiment 1 used realistic social media job posts displaying information about a firm's performance in either economic, legal, or ethical dimensions of CSR, or contained no information at all about the firm's CSR (control condition), to draw causal inferences and test the underlying mechanisms for each CSR dimension with a high degree of internal validity via regression-based conditional process analysis. Experiment 2 added information on the firm's country of origin and examined the inter-relationships between multiple CSR signals and perceptions of a firm's country of origin using fsQCA. fsQCA complements regression-based conditional process analysis by enabling us to explore the interactions between all the three CSR dimensions and country-of-origin perception in a configural manner, thereby uncovering multiple configurations of causal pathways that can lead to high job-pursuit intention through a configurational approach (Skarmeas, Leonidou, & Saridakis, 2014).

Table 6.1 provides a brief overview of the underlying research gaps, the derived research questions, the findings, and the contributions of each of the three studies performed.

**Table 6.1. Overview of research gaps, research questions, findings and contributions of the three studies**

Study	Underlying Research Gaps	Research Questions	Findings	Contributions
Study 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The “human side” of EMNEs is neglected</li> <li>• The role of CSR in international HRM is neglected</li> <li>• Lack of an international perspective in extant employee-focused micro-CSR research                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Primary focus on Western domestic firms, leaving country-level factors an under-researched area</li> </ul> </li> <li>• No prior studies addressed willingness to search for CSR information in international recruitment context                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ CSR can only exert an impact if applicants are aware of it</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Little is known about the boundary conditions under which CSR influences applicants                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Differentiation between CSR and perceived motives: some applicants may interpret the same CSR signal differently from others stemming from distrust of the firm’s motives, a key challenge of CSR communication</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does CSR help weaken the negative relationship between emerging country of origin of an MNE and job-pursuit intention of potential applicants in developed markets?</li> <li>• Are potential applicants in developed markets more willing to search for CSR information of MNEs from emerging countries than they are for CSR information of MNEs from developed countries?</li> <li>• Is the moderating effect of CSR on the negative relationship between emerging country of origin and job-pursuit intention moderated by sincere motive attribution of MNEs’ CSR?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applicants in developed host countries have lower job-pursuit intention for EMNEs than for DMNEs</li> <li>• CSR helps EMNEs mitigate this negative effect of originating from emerging countries, and especially high levels of perceived CSR increase job-pursuit intention for EMNEs regardless of motive attribution</li> <li>• Unlike EMNEs, CSR is less influential for DMNEs. The less relevance of CSR for DMNEs was shown by lower willingness to search for CSR information</li> <li>• Even though CSR information was available on the corporate webpage, 33.13% of the potential applicants did not view it, representing a serious impediment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contributing to literature on the liability of emergingness and aligning it with international HRM, bringing both fields forward</li> <li>• Expanding the horizons of individual-focused CSR research and contributing to the international HRM literature by adding a macro perspective, namely country of origin, and examining the interaction between CSR and a firm’s country of origin</li> <li>• Depicting a more complete picture regarding how different CSR perceptions impact applicants’ evaluations towards EMNEs and DMNEs by integrating signaling theory with attribution theory</li> <li>• Advancing knowledge about individual-level outcomes of CSR by examining the influences of individual skepticism</li> <li>• Exploring the potential of using behavioral experiments and leveraging the power of digital technology to complement survey-based methods in international business research</li> </ul>

## Conclusions

Study 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little is known about the relative importance of MNEs' country-of-origin and CSR as compared to other attributes             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Studies typically apply a compositional approach, evaluating job attributes in isolation from one another</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Lack of studies investigating multiple CSR dimensions             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ While CSR is a multi-facet construct, prior studies primarily focus on CSR's overall effects</li> </ul> </li> <li>• No systematic investigation of how different facets of employer image drive applicants' job choices in a cross-national context             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Research focuses narrowly on developed North American and European host countries, often with DMNEs as employers</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the relative importance of an MNE's country of origin (developed vs. emerging) and different CSR dimensions as compared to more traditional instrumental attributes in job choice decisions of young applicants from a developed country (the US) and an emerging country (Vietnam)?</li> <li>• To what extent does the relative importance of an MNE's country of origin and different CSR dimensions vary across developed and emerging countries? Do EMNEs suffer from liabilities of emergingness in emerging countries? And do emerging market applicants care about CSR?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MNE's country of origin was ranked second on the importance scale for both American and Vietnamese applicants, with EMNEs being less preferred than DMNEs</li> <li>• Each of the three CSR dimensions in the triple bottom line concept has a certain importance</li> <li>• National context moderates the importance of CSR dimensions             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Applicants from an emerging market attach more value to the economic dimension of CSR, but less value to the social and environmental CSR dimensions</li> </ul> </li> <li>• CSR can serve as a compensatory factor for emerging country of origin             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Significant negative correlations between country of origin and the economic and social CSR dimensions</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contributing to the international HRM literature by calibrating the relative importance of MNEs' country of origin and CSR against other salient workplace aspects in job choice</li> <li>• Contributing to the ongoing debate on whether EMNEs suffer from the liability of emergingness in recruiting by empirically demonstrating that they indeed do, even within the emerging markets themselves</li> <li>• Contributing to the measurement of CSR by showing that a more fine-grained perspective should be applied to study the impact of CSR on recruitment-related outcomes</li> <li>• Extending the symbolic attraction mechanism by demonstrating that preferences for job/organizational attributes are contingent upon national context encompassing aspects of socio-economics, institutional environments, and culture</li> </ul>
Study 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The underlying mechanisms by which different CSR dimensions influence applicants, especially those from emerging markets are still poorly understood</li> <li>• Which particular higher-order dimensions constitute country-of-origin image and how these higher-order dimensions interact with CSR and moderate the relationship between CSR and recruitment outcome remain unclear</li> <li>• Lack of studies taking a configurational perspective on the combination of signals at different level of analysis             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How applicants meaningfully aggregate meso-level (firm's various CSR components) and macro-level (firm's country of origin) signals</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the mechanisms that explain the underlying processes under which different dimensions of CSR affect applicants' job-pursuit intentions?</li> <li>• Does the strength of these mechanisms depend on firms' countries of origin? And if so, by which particular higher-order dimensions of country-of-origin image?</li> <li>• How do applicants aggregate signals from different aspects of CSR and MNEs' country of origin? What are the optimal CSR configurations for MNEs according to their origins?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic, legal, and ethical dimensions of CSR influence job-pursuit intention through different mediation patterns via organizational warmth and competence</li> <li>• The mediation effects between legal CSR and job-pursuit intention through organizational warmth and competence are not significant for MNEs from high-warmth and high-competence countries of origin</li> <li>• There are multiple configurations of causal conditions leading to a high job-pursuit intention             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Applicants combine meso-level (firm's economic, legal, and ethical CSR) and macro-level (firm's country of origin) factors in a configurational manner, such that no factors at any single level of analysis in isolation are sufficient for shaping micro-level applicants' outcomes in international recruitment</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uncovering the underlying mechanisms and boundary conditions under which CSR affects job-pursuit intention</li> <li>• Disentangling the effects of different CSR dimensions</li> <li>• Examining the higher-order dimensions constitute country-of-origin image in international recruitment</li> <li>• Proposing a novel configurational perspective on the signal-based mechanisms of CSR</li> </ul>

Overall, the first contribution of this thesis is to shed new light on the framing of individual CSR perceptions, or more precisely, “the type of heuristics that people mobilize to categorize information related to CSR” (Gond, El Akremi, Swaen, & Babu, 2017: 231). Although CSR is fundamentally a multi-dimensional construct that can be specified in many ways, extant literature primarily focuses on CSR’s overall effects and it thus remains unclear whether the different dimensions of CSR have differential influences on applicants (Gond et al., 2017; Jones, Newman, Shao, & Cooke, 2019; Zhao, Wu, Chen, & Zhou, 2022). Specifically, Study 2 found empirical evidence that each CSR dimension in the triple bottom line concept exerts a distinctive influence on job choice. This raised an intriguing possibility that the different dimensions of CSR influence job choice through heterogeneous underlying mechanisms. This was then confirmed in Study 3. Specifically, economic CSR increases applicants’ job-pursuit intention through higher perceived organizational competence. Ethical CSR, on the other hand, increases applicants’ job-pursuit intention through higher perceived organizational warmth, and sequentially through perceived organizational warmth and competence due to the primacy and spillover effect of warmth perception. Unlike the other two dimensions, legal CSR increases applicants’ job-pursuit intention not only through higher perceived organizational competence but also through higher perceived organizational warmth in the specific context of emerging markets. Therefore, integrating different CSR dimensions into one overall scale or relying upon any one dimension as a surrogate for the others may be flawed, which lends support to the call from Zhao et al. (2022) for a more fine-grained conceptualization of CSR. There is, moreover, evidence from Study 2 that the relative importance of different CSR dimensions varies across countries: in particular, applicants in emerging markets attach less value to the social and environmental dimensions, but put more emphasis on the economic dimension of CSR than applicants in developed markets do. It is therefore particularly important to apply a more detailed perspective to disentangle the effects of different CSR dimensions on MNEs’ international recruitment outcomes, given that international recruitment involves applicants from different countries with divergent value systems.

The second contribution of the thesis is to design an innovative solution for studying applicants’ willingness to search for CSR information of a firm, which is a determinant of their awareness of the firm’s CSR activities. Needless to say, good returns to CSR are contingent upon applicants’ awareness of a firm's CSR activities. Despite its importance, to date this issue has been neglected as previous research has mainly presumed or mandated CSR awareness in experimental settings. The use of interactive websites in Study 1, however, revealed that although CSR information was available on the corporate websites, 33.13% of the potential applicants did not view it, representing a serious impediment to firms’ attempts to maximize returns from their engagement with CSR. Another interesting finding from Study 1 was that, although applicants rated CSR as important (for example, 71% of males and 82% of females rated the employee relations dimension of CSR as very important/important, a 6-7 rating on the 7-point scale), they did not proactively seek CSR information, implying an attitude-behavior gap. This is in line with the attitude-behavior gap survey conducted by Zalando (2021), which found that “some 60% of survey respondents say that transparency is important to them, but just 20% actively seek out information as part of the purchasing process. Some 53% believe it

is important to buy from brands with ethical labor policies, but only 23% ever investigate policies themselves” (Zalando, 2021: 11). Thus, while studies show that CSR helps firms become more attractive as employers, the real challenges for MNEs are to make sure that applicants are well aware of their CSR activities and to close the attitude-behavior gap.

The third contribution of the thesis is to broaden current knowledge on CSR-related outcomes by examining two important yet neglected outcomes—applicant job choice and reward expectation/acceptance levels. First, applicant job choice is under-researched as scholars tend to overlook applicants’ actual decisions and instead focus on organizational attractiveness or behavioral intentions as the focal dependent variables (Gond et al., 2017; Highhouse, Thornbury, & Little, 2007; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). Rynes (1991: 436), nevertheless, has cautioned that “we have virtually no information about how preferences and intentions are converted into actual job choices.” Indeed, Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin, and Jones (2005) conducted a meta-analysis and reported a correlation of .18 between organizational attractiveness and job choice, and a correlation of .29 between intentions and job choice. While organizational attractiveness and intentions are significant antecedents of job choice, researchers should be cautious about treating them as proxies for job choice itself. Rynes (1991), in addition, commented that actual job choices entail certain opportunity costs because accepting one job offer precludes accepting others, whereas stating perceptions and intentions is a costless exercise. Second, there is evidence from marketing literature that having a strong brand allows firms to charge greater premiums and hence reduces price elasticity (Hoeffler & Keller, 2003; Keller, 1993; Keller & Lehmann, 2006). This could be extended to the employer branding context, implying that a strong employer brand with good CSR may affect expectations of employee rewards in such a way that applicants may accept lower salaries from firms with good CSR (Theurer, Tumasjan, Welp, & Lievens, 2018). To date, however, the relationship between CSR and expected or accepted employee rewards has remained poorly understood. These two research gaps are addressed in Study 2 by the use of choice-based conjoint analysis. Study 2 demonstrates that CSR is an important factor in applicant job choice, and in particular that applicants would be willing to forgo part of their salary in return for good (versus neutral) CSR. These findings not only extend current knowledge of CSR-related outcomes, but also practically strengthen the business case for investment in CSR.

The fourth contribution of the thesis is to address not only the “what” (i.e., the positive impacts of CSR) but also the “why” (i.e., the underlying mechanisms through which CSR affects applicants at the individual level of analysis). While the positive outcomes of CSR have long been studied, there is still a significant research gap in understanding the mechanisms which mediate the relationship between CSR and applicant attraction (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Jones, Willness, & Madey, 2014; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). Study 3 helps narrow this research gap by extending the micro-CSR perspective and introducing two fundamental dimensions underlying social perception in human interactions—warmth and competence—to clarify the underlying mechanisms and processes through which CSR affects applicants. Few researchers have shown that CSR positively influences applicants through corporate reputation (Behrend, Baker, & Thompson, 2009; Duarte, Gomes, & das Neves, 2014; Wang, 2013; Zhang, Cao, Zhang, Liu, & Li, 2020). Nevertheless, to obtain a more detailed understanding of this process, it is important to examine a firm’s reputation *for* or *as* something, rather than its

reputation per se (Foreman, Whetten, & Mackey, 2012). Therefore, drawing on social perceptions of warmth and competence adds a more nuanced mechanism that explains the relationship between CSR and applicant attitudes and behaviors toward an organization, which can ultimately generate spill-over effects on more macro-level outcomes (e.g., corporate reputation, sales, stock price, etc.).

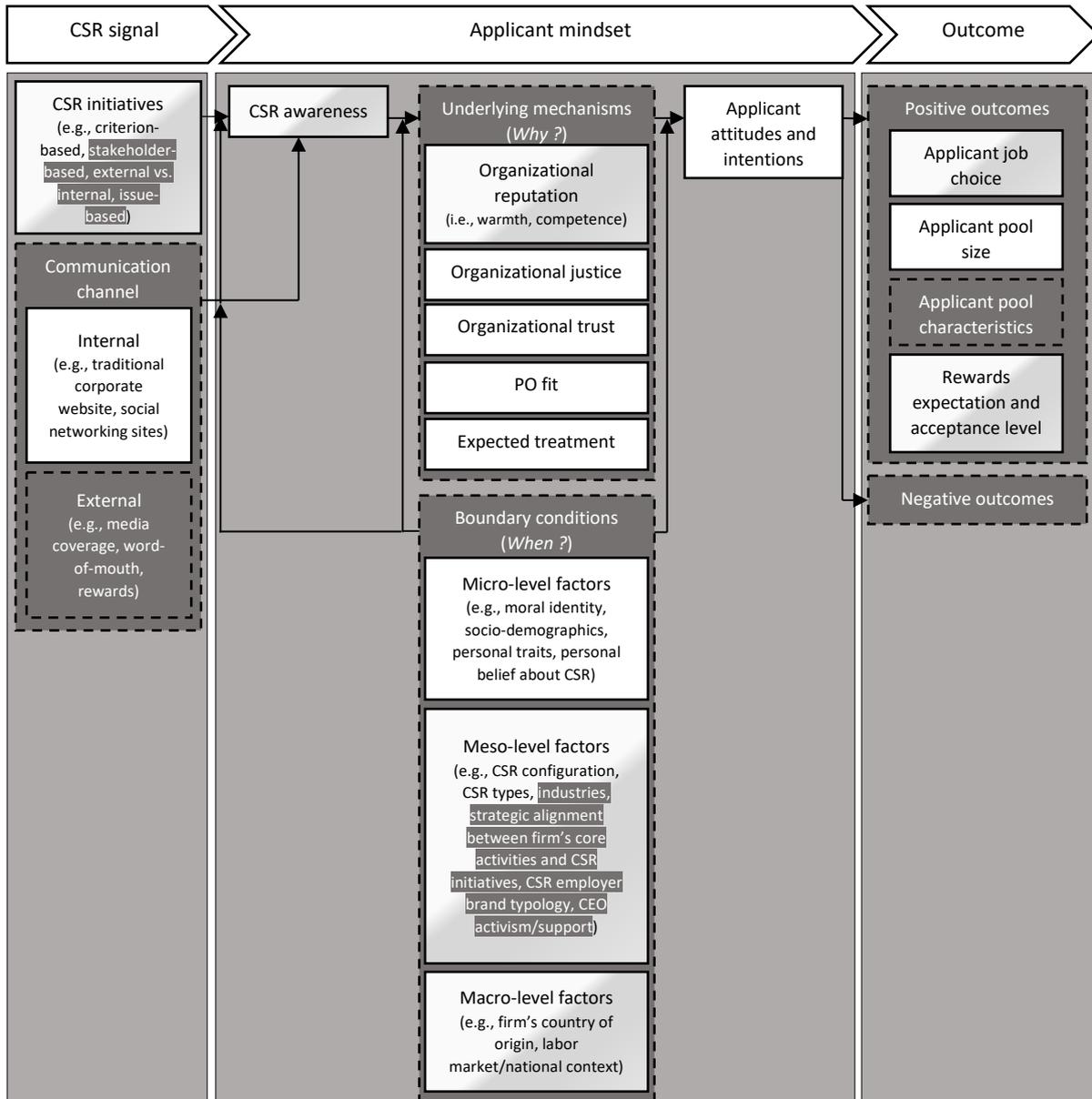
The fifth and perhaps most important contribution of the thesis is to investigate the interaction between MNEs' CSR and countries of origin in international recruitment. Such an international perspective on CSR is missing from the extant literature, as the most frequently studied moderators so far have been individual-level variables (Gond et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2019). CSR and firms' countries of origin are two of the most influential research areas in the international marketing literature, and by aligning them with the IHRM literature, the thesis informs all the three fields. Growing concern about social and environmental issues in tandem with the constant dread that the globalization of production and trade could drive a race to the bottom makes CSR an increasingly pressing area of enquiry in international business. Specifically, by adding a macro-level factor—a firm's country of origin—and examining the interplay between it and the firm's CSR, the thesis embraces the inherently complex and multilevel nature of international business and responds to the call for more multilevel work to bridge the gap across levels in micro studies of CSR (Fainshmidt, Witt, Aguilera, & Verbeke, 2020; Jones et al., 2019). Taken as a whole, the thesis highlights the importance of CSR in attracting talent in both developed and emerging host countries for MNEs, especially when the MNE's country-of-origin image is poor. Study 1 shows that CSR helps mitigate the negative effect of originating from emerging countries on hiring talents in developed host countries. Study 2 lends support to Study 1's finding that CSR serves as a compensatory factor for originating from an emerging country, helping EMNEs to close the gap with DMNEs in both developed and emerging host countries. However, it also raises doubts as to whether salary should be the central differentiator for EMNEs in attracting talent. Study 2 shows that salary certainly plays an important role and that EMNEs can, of course, offer a higher salary to overcome the country-of-origin constraints. However, CSR allows EMNEs to stand a better chance of escaping the stereotypes of their emerging countries of origin and help them stay competitive with DMNEs in the war for talent for the following reasons. Firstly, Study 2 suggests that offering a much higher salary (i.e., by at least 15% in the US and 31% in Vietnam) is needed to keep EMNEs competitive with DMNEs. This option might not be optimal since firms have limited resources. In addition, communicating high salaries may compensate for the low level of fit and attract applicants who only apply because of the high salary, which entails a risk of hiring ill-fitting applicants and consequently higher employee turnover in the long run (Baum & Kabst, 2013). Engaging in CSR, on the other hand, is a strategic decision because CSR has been found to enhance person-organization fit, which significantly improves job performance and commitment (Jones et al., 2014; Kim & Park, 2011; Zhang & Gowan, 2012). Evidence from a recent meta-analysis by Vishwanathan, van Oosterhout, Heugens, Duran, and van Essen (2020) further highlights that CSR positively affects corporate financial performance by enhancing firm reputation, increasing stakeholder reciprocation, mitigating firm risk, and strengthening innovation capacity. Moreover, Study 3 demonstrates that ethical CSR connotes warmth perception and is therefore particularly helpful when applicants interact with a firm for

the first time and have no prior information about it. Newcomer EMNEs are a case in point. Study 3 also finds that CSR can help boost EMNEs' perceived competence thanks to the spillover of warmth into competence. Secondly, EMNEs have to overcome the liability of emergingness with the assumption that they place less weight on CSR, by being good in CSR. Indeed, Study 1 provides evidence that CSR is more relevant for EMNEs than for DMNEs. Applicants are more concerned about CSR information of EMNEs originating from countries with prevalent institutional voids, hence their greater willingness to search for CSR information on EMNEs than on DMNEs. Finally, as mentioned in the theoretical background (see Figure 2.4), an applicant's process of employer choice consists of two processes: (1) a screening process in which applicants absorb signals about different potential future employers and eliminate those which are not compatible with their values and principles from the pool of potential employers; (2) a choosing process in which applicants continue to examine the options left from the screening process and choose to pursue job with the employer that offers the highest profitability to achieve their goals (Beach, 1993; Held & Bader, 2018; Spence, 1973). Therefore, it is imperative that EMNEs first pass the compatibility test by enhancing person-organization fit through good CSR.

The final contribution of the thesis is to present a novel configurational perspective on the signal-based mechanisms of CSR by considering the simultaneous effects of signals at different levels. Study 3 provides evidence that applicants do not combine meso-level (a firm's various CSR actions) and macro-level (a firm's country of origin) factors in a simple additive manner, but that the process is configurational and characterized by equifinality, implying the presence of multiple configurations of causal conditions leading to high job-pursuit intention. While MNEs cannot change their countries of origin and their country image cannot be improved in the short term, they can better allocate their scarce resources and develop suitable CSR strategies by acknowledging the effect of their country of origin. For instance, for MNEs from low-competence countries of origin, engaging in economic, legal, or ethical CSR may help boost their perceived competence. For MNEs from low-warmth countries of origin, a combination of good legal and ethical CSR might be a strategy worth pursuing. Interestingly, originating from a country that is perceived as both low-competence and low-warmth is not a complete dead end, as MNEs can overcome these constraints by engaging in all three CSR dimensions.

Taken together, Figure 6.1 provides an integrative framework for understanding the influence of CSR on applicants, which guides the development of CSR in international recruitment for MNEs.

**Figure 6.1. Integrative framework to understand how CSR affects applicants in international recruitment**



Note: Well-researched areas from the extant literature are highlighted in white; research gaps filled by this thesis are in gradient gray; emerging research gaps that warrant further investigation are in gray.

## 6.2. Limitations and Implications for Future Research

The thesis has some limitations, which will help provide direction for future research.

### 6.2.1. Pursuing Further Clarification and Development of the CSR Construct

Although the thesis sheds new light on the framing of CSR and underlines the importance of the differential effects of different CSR aspects, its operationalization of CSR is based on a responsibility-based view (e.g., the triple bottom line concept and Carroll's (1979) CSR categorization). While this responsibility-based view of CSR has been widely adopted, a major criticism of this view is that it cannot effectively differentiate external from internal forms of CSR (Gond et al., 2017). There is an ongoing debate over whether internal CSR has a stronger influence on (prospective) employees than external CSR, based on different complex

philosophical assumptions of human nature (Zhao et al., 2022). On the one hand, due to self-interest concerns, job applicants and employees would care more about internal CSR. On the other hand, due to general moral concerns and the positive influence of external CSR on organizational reputation, they would also care about external CSR (Farooq, Rupp, & Farooq, 2017). Indeed, CSR is fundamentally a multi-dimensional construct that can be further specified and differentiated in many ways (e.g., issue-based view, stakeholder-based view, internal vs. external view, etc.), hence the need for more research. On a higher level, future research should conduct a comprehensive and integrative examination of the various existing dimensions of the CSR concept, then go further and theorize, from the bottom up, a unified concept reflecting the refined dimensions of CSR in recruitment. This will also facilitate knowledge consolidation across studies.

In addition, no study has empirically examined how the gap between expected and perceived CSR influences applicant evaluations. To the extent that the alignment and consistency between expected and perceived CSR varies, these two aspects of CSR may interact in such a way that greater alignment leads to more positive effects on applicant outcomes. Therefore, MNEs should be aware of the expectations of applicants globally to act and set CSR standards accordingly. Despite high levels of interest in the CSR of MNEs, discussions on the international dimensions of CSR remain at an early stage and little is known about the expectations that applicants from different countries have about the CSR of MNEs from different countries of origin (Cooke, Wood, Wang, & Veen, 2019; Han, 2015). To address these gaps, further studies should examine expectations and objective measures of CSR.

### **6.2.2. Bolstering the Effectiveness of CSR Communication**

This thesis is a first step towards enhancing the understanding of applicants' CSR awareness, which is a requisite for the generation of good returns from CSR. Applicants' relatively low awareness, stemming from their relatively low willingness to search for information on MNEs' CSR activities, remains a critical impediment to MNEs' attempts to maximize the benefits from their CSR activities, highlighting the need for further research into the effectiveness of CSR communication. In addition, the prospect of being able to examine applicants' willingness to search for CSR information demonstrated in the thesis serves as a continuous impulse for future research into CSR communication strategies. However, studying the effectiveness of CSR communication would require examination of a variety of communication channels which were not included in the experimental studies in this thesis. There are a variety of communication channels (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010). For instance, MNEs can communicate their CSR activities through official documents (e.g., annual CSR reports, press releases), TV commercials, magazine advertisements, or CSR-dedicated sections on corporate social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.). Besides firm-controlled CSR communication channels, there are also external communicators of CSR (e.g., media, word-of-mouth, etc.) that are not entirely controlled by the firm. Future studies should explore which channels or simultaneous combinations of channels are most effective in enhancing applicants' awareness of CSR and their willingness to search for information about it.

### **6.2.3. Bridging Multiple Underlying Mechanisms**

While the thesis sheds light on the underlying mechanisms through which CSR affects applicants, it does not examine the relationships between the proposed mechanisms involving two fundamental dimensions of social perception with other mechanisms found in previous studies (e.g., organizational justice, organizational trust, or person-organization fit). Theories explaining the mechanisms that mediate the reactions of applicants to CSR remain fragmented, without any integrative and comprehensive meta-framework for understanding how various underlying mechanisms might combine to account for the effect of CSR (Gond et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2019; Zhao et al., 2022). Future research, therefore, should consider multiple mechanisms simultaneously and apply meta-analytical structural equation modeling<sup>8</sup> to clarify how and why these mechanisms interact, in an attempt to consolidate current knowledge of CSR's impacts on applicants. Such consolidation is crucial not only to delineate the mechanisms underlying reactions to CSR but also to reduce fragmentation and gain a better insight into various theoretical perspectives on CSR outcomes.

### **6.2.4. Considering Additional Boundary Conditions at the Firm Level**

The choice of controlled experimental method is one of the thesis's strengths because experiments have the highest explanatory power, and help establish direct causality through an interventionist logic by controlling for other extraneous factors that are difficult to isolate in the field settings (Zellmer-Bruhn, Caligiuri, & Thomas, 2016). However, it has some weaknesses that may open up several avenues for future research. As mentioned in the Chapter 2, the complexity and complication of CSR means that it is crucial to understand how CSR is socially constructed in a specific context and how to take this into account when developing business strategies at the operational level. Therefore, future studies could use other scenarios (e.g., MNEs in other industries apart from consumer goods, MNEs' transferring of socially irresponsible practices to their subsidiaries, other CSR types, CSR fit, CEO support, CSR decoupling, etc.) to reflect the complex context of which MNEs are a part and which can either amplify or dampen the effect of CSR. This set of boundary conditions could be categorized on the basis of (1) organizational characteristics, (2) CSR types, and (3) CSR-related organizational factors.

First, with regard to the organizational characteristics, the thesis did not take industry differences into account. Industry stereotypes (e.g., controversial vs. non-controversial industries, "dirty" vs. "clean" industries) can provide additional insights and moderate applicants' responses to CSR (Shea & Hawn, 2019). Furthermore, the attractiveness of MNEs may vary widely between different industries (Holtbrügge & Kreppel, 2015; Laroche, Papadopoulos, Heslop, & Mourali, 2005). For instance, Chinese home appliance producers enjoy a better reputation than Chinese carmakers.

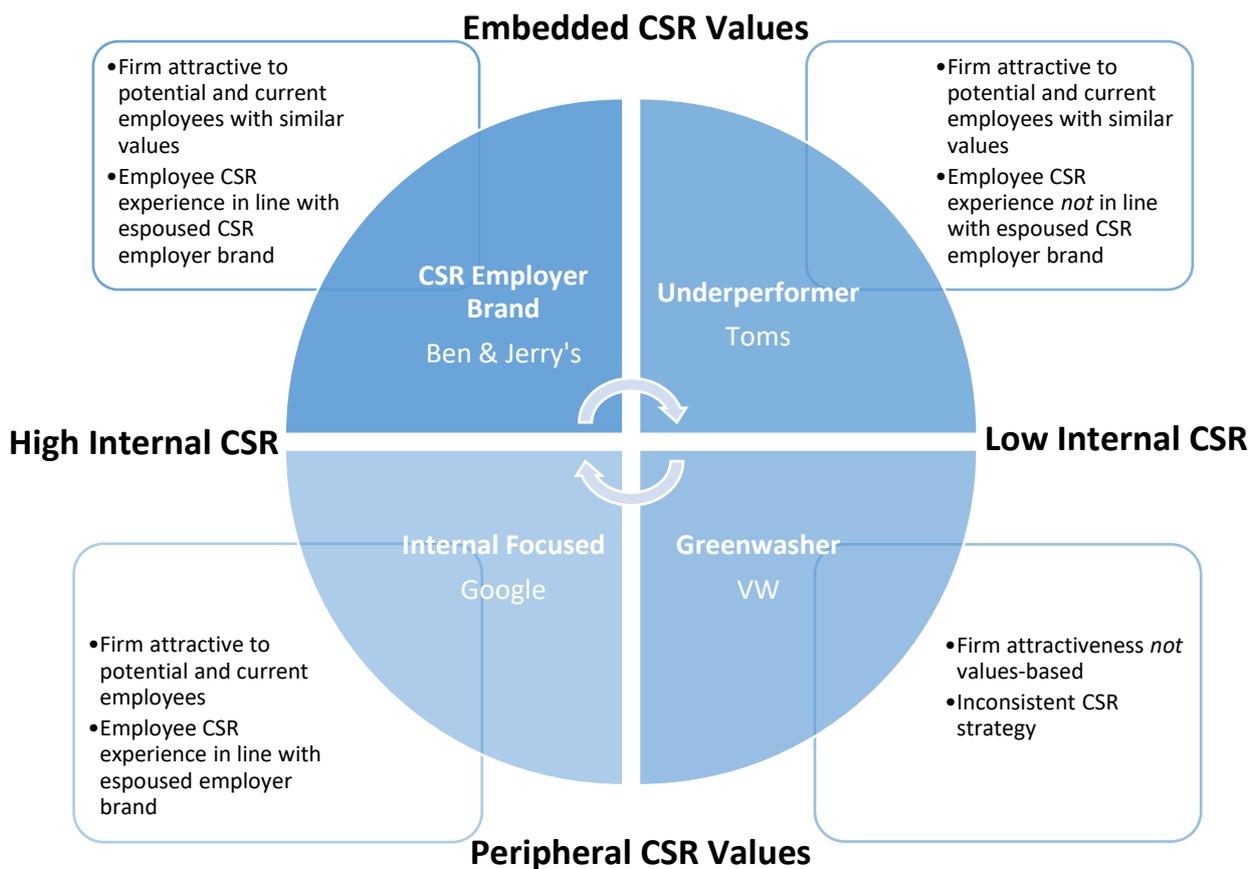
Second, with regard to different types of CSR, as the focus of the thesis is on the responsibility-based view, it is likely that dissimilar effects would have arisen if the focus had been on other types of CSR (e.g., external vs. internal CSR) (Zhao et al., 2022).

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<sup>8</sup> Meta-analytic structural equation modeling is a meta-analytic technique that combines the strengths of meta-analysis and structural equation modeling.

Third, with regard to CSR-related organizational factors, it is conceivable that not only CSR itself but the congruence between CSR and the core operations of a firm, which is referred to as CSR fit, contributes to the effect of CSR on recruitment (Porter & Kramer, 2007). For example, environmental issues are of more critical importance for firms in automobile industry than they are for the retailing industry. Donia, Ronen, Sirsly, and Bonaccio (2019) find evidence that when firms focus on less relevant CSR initiatives, employees may perceive this as a symbolic initiative and not a true CSR initiative, thus dampening the effects of CSR. In addition, Carlini, Grace, France, and Lo Iacono (2019) have recently developed a typology of the CSR employer branding on the basis of (1) the embeddedness of CSR values, and (2) levels of internal CSR, which could be useful context-specific factors pertaining to the organizational level (see Figure 6.2). Further, CEO activism could also be a potential moderating factor (Agnihotri & Bhattacharya, 2021). Nowadays, CEOs have taken a stance on CSR issues through CEO activism. In line with cue consistency theory, CEO activism would enhance the perceived genuineness of the intentions of firms engaging in CSR, thus amplifying CSR effects (Agnihotri & Bhattacharya, 2021; Chernev & Blair, 2015). In summary, the thesis calls for more research into the moderating effects of organizational characteristics, CSR types, and CSR-related organizational factors.

**Figure 6.2. CSR employer brand characteristics and typology**



Source: Carlini et al. (2019)

### **6.2.5. Integrating Relevant Individual Differences and Examining Applicant Pool Characteristics**

While this thesis shows that CSR has notable effects on the size of firms' applicant pools and hence the utility of selection systems, a more practically relevant question for future research is whether CSR influences applicant pool characteristics, or, more precisely, whether CSR helps attract not only more applicants, but also better applicants. Unfortunately, all the three studies in the thesis did not look into applicants' individual differences and used a sample of young and highly-educated individuals. Therefore, it is recommended that further research should include a broader sample and measure intellectual abilities (e.g., general mental ability), education, achievements, and other predictors of job performance to examine CSR impacts on applicant pool quality. While weak applicants with few choices tend to apply to as many vacancies as possible to maximize their employment chance, strong applicants with considerable choices can afford to consider employers' merits before submitting any applications (Chapman & Webster, 2006; Turban & Greening, 1997). Thus, strong applicants may use CSR to distinguish between multiple potential employers.

### **6.2.6. Exploring the Dark Side of CSR**

Few researchers have shown that CSR communication may not always result in positive reactions (Bridoux, Stofberg, & Den Hartog, 2016; Maon, Vanhamme, De Roeck, Lindgreen, & Swaen, 2019; Zhang & Gowan, 2012). This implies that future research should not focus only on positive outcomes, but also expand to include negative outcomes. Few studies have been carried out on how and when CSR evokes negative attitudinal and behavioral consequences among employees. For example, Donia et al. (2019) have found that employees care not only about what their employers do, but also about why they do it (i.e., the underlying organizational motivation for CSR engagement), and that gains obtained from greenwashing (i.e., symbolic CSR) may come at the expense of valued employee-level outcomes. Scheidler, Edinger-Schons, Spanjol, and Wieseke (2019), in addition, have revealed that inconsistencies between internal and external CSR efforts (i.e., favoring external over internal stakeholders) cause employees to perceive corporate hypocrisy on the part of their employer, which, in turn, results in emotional exhaustion and high employee turnover. Although previous work has uncovered some potential boundary conditions of the positive effects of CSR on employees, discussions of the adverse effects of CSR communication on potential applicants remain limited (Jones, Willness, & Heller, 2016; Klimkiewicz & Oltra, 2017; Rupp, Shao, Thornton, & Skarlicki, 2013). Jones et al. (2016) provide preliminary evidence of potentially negative reactions to CSR among applicants. In their experimental study, one-third of their potential applicant sample reported that their attraction was unaffected by the employer's community involvement or environmental sustainability efforts, and a few others reported being less attracted by those practices, because they were skeptical and cynical about the CSR of the employer. Therefore, future studies should further explore whether and why some job seekers are unaffected or even repelled by an employer's CSR. This is also partially linked to the effectiveness of CSR communication (see part 6.2.2). Key challenges of CSR communication include not only how to raise applicant awareness of a firm's CSR activities, but also how to minimize skepticism and cynicism among applicants (Du et al., 2010).

In addition, this thesis draws attention to the dark side of CSR, including theorizing and evaluating recruitment outcomes specifically driven by corporate social irresponsibility (CSI) rather than CSR. A drawback of the thesis is that none of the websites and job posts used in the experiments advertised “poor” or “bad” CSR, as there was no realistic way to recreate this. Future research may take a step further by distinguishing between CSR and CSI. As Lange and Washburn (2012) have shown, CRI is a distinct construct that elicits different interpretations from CSR, and merits further consideration because evidence from social psychology research indicates that individuals process positive-negative information asymmetrically with a negativity bias, suggesting the higher diagnostic value of negative information (Rothenhoefer, 2019; Skowronski & Carlston, 1987). It may also be interesting to study MNEs that have reacted to mounting stakeholder pressure by transferring their socially irresponsible practices to subsidiaries located in pollution havens, or by widespread outsourcing in disaggregated global supply chains (Kim & Davis, 2016; Surroca, Tribo, & Zahra, 2013).

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