The Role of Regulative Institutions in the Effects of Social, Environmental, and Economic CSR Dimensions across Nations

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Multinational corporations (MNCs) implement corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives in different regulative environments to attract consumers internationally. However, while CSR in general impacts consumer behavior across nations, it is unclear why and how perceptions of social, environmental, and economic CSR dimensions engage consumers in certain countries but not in other countries. The authors address this research area by referring to theoretical rationales and empirically studying the impacts of CSR dimensions on customer engagement behavior across 26 countries. They aim to contribute to our knowledge of how national institutions, especially important regulative institutions, reinforce or reduce dimensional effects, which is relevant for MNCs and public stakeholders. Using multilevel structural equation modeling, this study shows different and surprising strengths of CSR dimensions for consumer engagement and positive and negative continuous moderations of regulative institutions. The findings provide direct suggestions for MNCs and public stakeholders interested in multidimensional CSR effects across countries.

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1. Introduction

Perceived corporate social responsibility (i.e., perceptions of firms' social, environmental and economic initiatives; Aramburu and Pescador 2019; Luger et al. 2022; CSR) is highly relevant for attracting consumers (Ozkan et al. 2022; Vera-Martínez et al. 2022). Multinational corporations (MNCs), such as Bosch (2023) and Volkswagen (2023), signal their social, environmental and economic CSR to globally appeal to consumers; but these dimensions are often advantageous in one country but not in another. Bosch, for example, highlights the relevance of the regulatory requirements worldwide to which it complies. In doing so, MNCs should consider consumer responses to CSR dimensions and the role of regulative institutions as the most important national context. This indicates the only study across many, namely 43 countries on direct and indirect effects of overall CSR through trust and quality perceptions on consumers' purchase intention with conceptualizations and tests of major national institutions as moderators (Zimmer and Swoboda 2023). This study analyzes whether CSR toward the society, the environment, and the economy (equally) affect customer engagement behavior (i.e., behavioral manifestations with a firm focus that go beyond purchase behavior alone such as recommendation and word-of-mouth, Leckie et al. 2021; Steinhoff et al. 2022; Van Doorn et al. 2010) and how countries' regulations moderate these effects.

Scholars have analyzed CSR extensively, although reviews of the literature show that only 7 % of studies focus on consumers to which we contribute (Kumar and Srivastava 2022). Respective international studies have mostly studied *overall CSR*, i.e., effects of one construct on various outcomes by comparing few countries (e.g., Chu et al. 2020; Choi et al. 2016; *Fig. 1*).[1] Across many countries, only Zimmer and Swoboda (2023) have studied country contexts in overall CSR effects on purchase intentions and showed regulative institutions as the most important moderator. *CSR dimensions* have been analyzed in country-comparing studies, with inconclusive insights. For example, Contini et al. (2020) revealed the social dimension to be most important for enhancing consumer loyalty in BRICS countries, while Marquina

	CSR overall (joint view)	CSR dimensions
Country comparison	Chu et al. 2020; Choi et al. 2016; *Auger et al. 2008, 2010*; Diallo et al. 2021; *Einwillser et al. 2019*; Eisingerich and Rubera 2010; Feldman and Vasquez-Parraga 2013; Heinberg et al. 2021; Lim et al. 2018; Magnus-son et al. 2015; Moon et al. 2015; Russell and Russell 2010; Shea and Hawn 2019; *Strizhakova et al. 2010*; Walsh and Bartikowski 2013	Contini et al. 2020; Luger et al. 2022; Marquina and Morales 2012; Singh et al. 2008
Across nations	Zimmer and Swoboda 2023	**This study**

Note: Italics = CSR-related constructs (e.g., ethicality, green, social).

Fig. 1: Literature

and Morales (2012) found no effect of such a dimension in Peru (vs. Spain). Singh et al. (2008) underlined the major impact of economic CSR on corporate image in the UK and Spain, while Luger et al. (2022) found a significant effect of economic CSR on awareness in China but not in Austria, where environmental CSR is stronger (social CSR does not differ). Also national studies find insignificant relationships between different CSR dimensions and outcomes (e.g., Currás-Pérez et al. 2018; Jung et al. 2020; Ozkan et al. 2022). Thus, research is partly contradictory and offers research gaps. *First*, an important gap in our knowledge is the theoretical rationale for cross-national effects of CSR dimensions. These effects are theoretically and practically important, as they provide a more comprehensive view of consumers' perceptions and reveal why consumers respond stronger to certain CSR dimensions than to others (e.g., Barbarossa et al. 2022). *Second*, scholars, MNCs and public stakeholders know little about the likely different roles of country contexts in these effects, while scholars assume such roles but cannot theorize them when comparing few countries that variously differ institutionally (e.g., Luger et al. 2022). As mentioned, regulative institutions have been shown to be most important for overall CSR.

This study addresses this issue with two research questions: How strongly do perceived social, environmental, and economic CSR affect customer engagement behavior across nations? How do national regulative institutions moderate these effects? This study contributes to the literature in two ways.

Newly studying cross-national effects of CSR dimensions on engagement behavior refers to calls in literature (Lim et al. 2022; Vera-Martínez et al. 2022) and the dominant three-dimensional CSR approach (Castro-González et al. 2019; Luger et al. 2022). Engagement behaviour is increasingly relevant and demanded due to increasing interactions between firms and consumers; it represents more intimate relationships to MNCs that are important to engage societies in CSR (Al-Haddad et al. 2022; Leckie et al. 2021). CSR dimensions refer to substantive areas of MNCs' initiatives, activities and stakeholder interrelations (Baskentli et al. 2019). Understanding cross-national dimensional effects on engagement behavior reveals why or where consumers respond stronger to firms' CSR efforts and enables MNCs' to predict preferences (Barbarossa et al. 2022; Vera-Martínez et al. 2022). We contribute to this understanding and clarify inconclusive extant studies as their insights are not easily transferable to further countries (e.g., less regulated emerging ones; Luger et al. 2022). MNCs need to understand whether consumers emphasize certain CSR dimensions over others as they aim to manage CSR in ways that cross-nationally benefit performance (i.e., stimulating consumers) and meet societal aims (i.e., engaging consumers in societal causes). Without such understanding, MNCs could communicate dimensional CSR attempts in ways that fail to stimulate consumers or benefit societies (Barbarossa et al. 2022). Theoretically, we contribute to the application of signaling theory which is established in studies on overall but not dimensional CSR (e.g., Heinberg et al. 2021; Zimmer and Swoboda 2023). This theory is useful because it captures CSR dimensions as different signals that consumers use as cognitive shortcuts for their engagement behavior (e.g., Zerbini 2017).

We expand our knowledge with insights into the role of regulative institutions as continuous moderators of dimensional CSR effects across nations. Scholars have assumed different roles of regulative institutions for such effects but have not studied them. Regulations are important because they differ across countries and strongly affect consumers' responses to overall CSR and MNCs' CSR initiatives through government incentives or sanctions (Li et al. 2018; Zimmer and Swoboda 2023). They may favor the effects of certain CSR dimensions over others and indicate trade-offs between MNCs and public stakeholders regarding consumer engagement and beneficial societal impacts (Khan et al. 2015; Yang et al. 2021). Thus, theoretical rationales for moderation across nations are valuable, as regulative institutions – and further signaling environments in stability checks – may differently affect the observability or strength of the signals of each CSR dimension. Multilevel structural equation modeling (MSEM) shows respective country-level variances and thus strengths of the moderations.

2. Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Conceptualizations and Theory

We conceptualize perceived *social*, *environmental* and *economic CSR dimensions* (Aramburu and Pescador 2019; Luger et al. 2022). Although overall CSR makes it easier to capture consumer perceptions, it does not allow for the discrimination of dimensional effects (even if overall CSR is designed based on dimensions; Castro-González et al. 2019; Zimmer and Swoboda 2023). The *multidimensional* conceptualization continues to prevail as it allows a more holistic understanding of CSR perceptions and is empirically substantiated (Alvarado-Herrera et al. 2017). It provides more differentiated insights into why consumer responses may not be equal to CSR dimensions (Barbarossa et al. 2022). Another known approach is the four dimensional pyramid by Carroll (1991), which, however, does not appropriately reflect consumers' thoughts, as consumers do not manage to discriminate these dimensions (e.g., Currás-Pérez et al. 2018). CSR reports with different dimensions are not or cannot be applied in consumer CSR studies (e.g., ESG, KLD; Baskentli et al. 2019). The sustainable development approach is particularly suitable for studying consumer perspectives (e.g., Alvarado-Herrera et al. 2017). It distinguishes areas of concern presented on a triple bottom line consisting of people, planet and profit; it is widespread, current and can be considered by MNCs and public stakeholders (Luger et al. 2022; Ozkan et al. 2022).

The *social dimension* includes MNCs' obligation to make decisions and take actions that promote the welfare and interests of society (Xia et al. 2018). It considers the relationship of a firm with its sociocultural environment, the support of good causes and local activities (Aramburu and Pescador 2019; Currás-Pérez et al. 2018). The *environmental dimension* comprises companies' impact on living and nonliving natural systems in the environment, including land, air, water and biodiversity (Xia et al. 2018). This refers to firms' environmentally responsible behavior, including resource usage, eco-friendly products and climate protection (Currás-Pérez et al. 2018; Ozkan et al. 2022). The *economic dimension* describes considerations of economic impacts that a firm's activities have on the community and stakeholders (Xia et al. 2018). It considers aspects such as continuous growth, economic performance, or offering of quality goods (Currás-Pérez et al. 2018; Jung et al. 2020). Conceptualizing the dimensions as individual signals reveals their relative strengths.

Customer engagement behavior is conceptualized as consumers' behavioral manifestations that have a firm focus (e.g., beyond purchase, Leckie et al. 2021; Steinhoff et al. 2022; Van Doorn et al. 2010). Studies have analyzed the effects of CSR on different consumer responses (e.g., attachment intentions, willingness to pay; Choi et al. 2016; Diallo et al. 2021; Heinberg et al. 2021). Scholars have also identified consumers' engagement behavior as an important outcome of CSR and called for research to understand how firms' CSR initiatives can increase it (Lim et al. 2022). Firms' focuses also shift to understanding customers' challenges to improve their lives and to involve them as spokespersons of a firm. Engagement behavior consists of customer purchase experiences and social contributions such as referrals and influence that customers provide (Pansari and Kumar 2017; Servera-Francés et al. 2020). It becomes relevant due to increasing interactions within social groups, between firms and consumers and the latter's active purchases and communication (Al-Haddad et al. 2022; Servera-Francés et al. 2020). This behavior represents a more intimate relational connection to MNCs and comprises important social elements that are important for firms and public stakeholders caring about engaging societies (Leckie et al. 2021; Pansari and Kumar 2017).

We conceptualize *regulative institutions* as national rules and laws that ensure stability and order in societies (Kostova et al. 2020). They guide social interactions and are seen similar to formal institutions, as both refer to North (1990, p. 3), and both are measured in the same way (commonly as World Governance Indicators; Kostova et al. 2020). Strong regulative institutions pressure CSR social, environmental and economic initiatives to adhere to countries' legal requirements and regulations, which also attain and maintain legitimacy by engaging consumers (Khan et al. 2015; Rathert 2016). They are also relevant for politicians as lawmakers can monitor and encourage CSR activities of MNCs and use laws to promote implementation and communication of CSR dimensions for the benefit of consumers or society in general (Magnusson et al. 2015; Zimmer and Swoboda 2023). We conceptualize regulative institutions' moderation to gain knowledge about why and how they differently moderate multidimensional CSR effects on consumers' engagement behavior.

Theory. Consumer studies on CSR dimensions refer to various theories (e.g., probabilistic choice, attraction theories; Castro-González et al. 2019; Marquina and Morales 2012). *Signaling theory* is established in studies on overall CSR but respective theoretical rationales for CSR dimensions are missing (e.g., Heinberg et al. 2021; Magnusson et al. 2015). We base our theoretical reasoning on this theory for several reasons (Spence 1973). MNCs' CSR initiatives are valid market signals because they convey information to consumers and act as cognitive shortcuts, enabling them to infer the aspects of business and choose their engagement partners accordingly due to information asymmetry (Aramburu and Pescador 2019; Magnusson et al. 2015). Consumers perceive CSR dimensions as multiple signals of a MNC's goodwill based on their efforts to engage in different CSR activities (e.g., Heinberg et al. 2021). Their degree of behavioral relevance is determined by the observability of signals, their calibration in terms of strength, and how well they com-

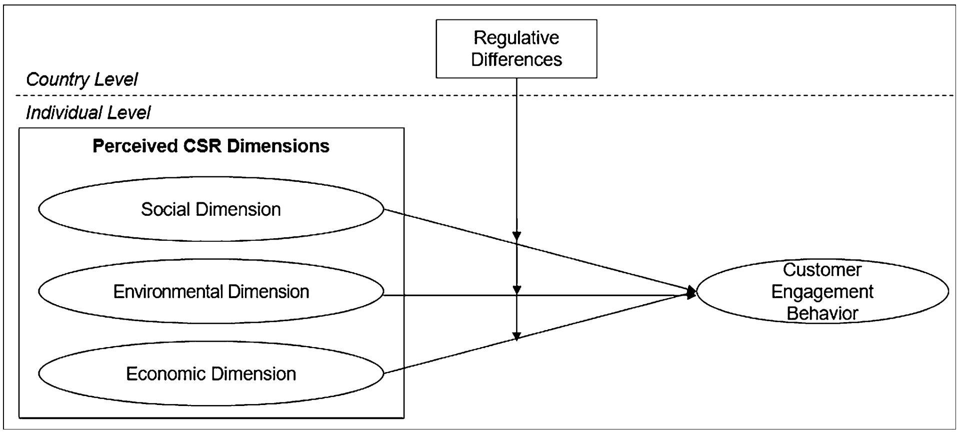


Fig. 2: Framework

plement individual expectations (Connelly et al. 2011). Different types of CSR information may send different types of signals that relate differently to engagement behavior, as stronger relationships emerge when signals and outcomes are related (e.g., Zerbini 2017). Moreover, country differences due to regulations affect behaviors and cognitive thoughts that people in a society share (e.g., Zimmer and Swoboda 2023). Such signaling environments make cues less or more observable, strong or expectation fitting, which influences the extent to which CSR signals impact engagement behavior (e.g., Connelly et al. 2011). We argue that regulative country differences moderate the cross-national impacts of perceived CSR's social, environmental, and economic dimensions differently and additionally employ institutional theory rationales. *Fig. 2* summarizes our framework.

2.2. Hypotheses on the Effects of CSR Dimensions

Our baseline hypotheses address general CSR dimensional effects. Regarding the *social CSR dimension,* studies shows positive effects in countries compared (e.g., Luger et al. 2022), while national studies indicate also insignificant effects (e.g., in Spain or Cyprus, Currás-Pérez et al. 2018; Ozkan et al. 2022). We suspect positive effects across nations.

Theoretically, MNCs' perceived *social CSR dimension* is a signal that cross-nationally fits individuals' expectations and engages them with a MNC due to its social initiatives (Aramburu and Pescador 2019; Zerbini 2017). We argue that consumers cross-nationally increasingly consider and demand social initiatives (Contini et al. 2020). As members of each society, MNCs carrying out social responsibilities to individual communities are seen as appropriate initiatives (Jung et al. 2020). Consumers notice MNCs' collaboration in future-oriented social causes as a CSR signal that prompts closer relational ties with firms (Currás-Pérez et al. 2018; Leckie et al. 2021). They refer to such signals and engage stronger with firms that intend to build relationships in a society (Zerbini 2017).

Regarding *environmental CSR* international studies are inconclusive by showing stronger effect in Austria than in China but insignificant ones in Brazil vs. China (Luger et al. 2022; Contini et al. 2020). National studies also show insignificant effects (e.g., in the USA or Mexico, Eisingerich et al. 2023; Vera-Martínez et al. 2022). Across nations, positive effects are expected.

Individuals see MNCs' efforts regarding *environmental CSR* as an observable and engaging signal of responsibility (Aramburu and Pescador 2019; Jung et al. 2020). Consumers notice which MNCs value environmental protection and are more involved and socially connected with them than with others (Pansari and Kumar 2017), however, not in all countries (Singh et al. 2008; Vera-Martínez et al. 2022). As firms' environmental CSR addresses the environment or planet in general, it is less perceived as self- or society-serving behavior (Eisingerich et al. 2023). Respective signals are said to be more observed by individualistic individuals (Vera-Martínez et al. 2022). Across nations, however, the environmental CSR signal reducing harmful impacts for the environment leads to closer relationships with consumers whose responses benefit MNCs and the environment itself (Al-Haddad et al. 2022).

For *economic CSR,* internationally different effect strengths emerge (e.g., stronger in the UK than in Spain, Singh et al. 2008); nationally also insignificant effects emerge (e.g., in South Korea or Jordan, Jung et al. 2020; Al-Haddad et al. 2022). We hypothesize a positive effect.

This dimension incorporating MNCs' economic impact on community and stakeholders, for example, is a *strong* signal in competition that engages consumers (Aramburu and Pescador 2019). Respective MNCs can expect visibility (Singh et al. 2008) as economic associations attract consumers, particularly in emerging countries (Arli and Lasmono 2010; Luger et al. 2022). Here, economic CSR contributes to perceived firm credibility (Vera-Martínez et al. 2022); MNCs' signal through offerings are perceived as economic support for a society and engage individuals (Ozkan et al. 2022). This differs in other countries. However, we argue that cross-nationally consumers show their engagement in MNCs' *economic CSR signals* through social interaction or communication (Pansari and Kumar 2017). This signal supports consumers' appraisal of MNCs and leads to referrals among peers, for example. We argue:

H1: Consumers' perceived (a) social, (b) environmental and (c) economic CSR dimensions have a positive impact on their engagement behavior across countries.

The relative strength of the CSR dimensions has not yet been hypothesized; country comparisons show alternately perceived social, environmental or economic dimensions as the strongest (Contini et al. 2020; Marquina and Morales 2012; Singh et al. 2008), and national studies mostly environmental CSR (Eisingerich et al. 2023; Jung et al. 2020). We newly argue that cross-nationally the social dimension most strongly engages consumers.

Generally, *CSR dimensions* are differently perceived signals that convey inherent information, differentially reduce information asymmetries (Aramburu and Pescador 2019; Zerbini 2017) and affect consumers' engagement behavior (Allen et al. 2007). The social CSR dimension tends to have the strongest impact because consumers perceive it as a particularly strong and fitting signal, as many CSR initiatives focus on responsibility toward a country's society (e.g., Öberseder et al. 2013). Given this strong focus and consequently high expenses on social CSR activities, respective signal costs are high making the social CSR signal highly credible and observable for consumers leading to engagement with the MNC (Connelly et al. 2011). In addition, signals have different influences depending on the order they are perceived (Taj 2016). The social CSR signal is likely to take priority here due to its direct impact on the consumer's immediate living environment. The social initiatives of MNCs are aimed at individual communities and societies and are viewed particularly positively in many countries (Ipsos 2023).

In contrast, MNCs' economic reputation is particularly important in less regulated countries, and MNCs' environmental CSR in developed countries only (Arli and Lasmono 2010; Swoboda et al. 2017). The social dimension contributes directly to the welfare of a society and fits consumers' considerations of society and the respective demands of firms (Ipsos 2023; Xia et al. 2018). Consequently, social CSR likely engages consumers cross-nationally the most. This is also because social CSR and engagement behavior share a common referent through social and community-oriented elements (e.g., Allen et al. 2007). Individuals may even be aware that their corresponding responses improve their lives and those of society to some extent. This CSR dimension reasonably most strongly affects consumers' word-of-mouth and referrals across nations (Pansari and Kumar 2017). We hypothesize:

H2: The effect of the perceived social CSR dimension on consumer engagement behavior is greater than that of the (a) environmental and (b) economic CSR dimensions across countries.

2.3. Hypotheses on the Moderation of Regulative Institutions

Regulative institutions moderate cross-nationally overall perceived CSR effects (Zimmer and Swoboda 2023), while international or national research on CSR dimensions assumes but does not hypothesize this (e.g., Luger et al. 2022). The roles of regulative institutions for the effects of perceived CSR dimensions have not yet been hypothesized. We expect different and reversed moderation signs. This is because regulative institutions in general guide and govern the motivations and behaviors of members of a society but differently regarding the perceived CSR dimensions (Li et al. 2018). They pressure MNCs to act environmentally sustainably in a society, which, in the case of higher (vs. lower) degrees of regulative institutions, impacts dimensional perceptions differently (Khan et al. 2015). Additionally, individuals in societies are guided by regulative institutions and thus affect their expectations and evaluations of the strength or observability of dimensional CSR (Connelly et al. 2011). Both rationales support our theoretical argument that regulative institutions, as important signaling environments, increase or decrease dimensional CSR effects.

Regulative institutions were not studied in contexts of *perceived social CSR*. We argue that increasing rules cross-nationally decrease the effects of this dimension on consumer engagement behavior.

Higher regulative institutions in a country ensure that MNCs disclose social CSR initiatives to comply, which is highly relevant for MNCs to overcome the liability of foreignness (Khan et al. 2015) or to obtain regulative legitimacy (Ang et al. 2015). However, we argue that consumers in their respective society particularly consider and demand the social criteria of MNCs because of the present rules and laws and subsequently engage with them (Contini et al. 2020). Consumers are shaped by regulative institutions and, particularly, carry out CSR initiatives that contribute to the welfare of individual communities and societies and have respective expectations of MNCs as social actors (Yang et al. 2021). Also, their engagement behavior with a firm is similar to that of social CSR initiatives due to both social and community-oriented elements (Allen et al. 2007). Consequently, higher regulative institutions increase perceived social CSR signals' fit with consumers' expectations and engage them. In contrast, in countries with *lower regulative institutions*, the pressures of MNCs are weak (Khan et al. 2015), consumers have lower expectations regarding firms' social initiatives, and perceived social CSR signals are less likely to be considered information cues for engagement with MNCs. Across nations, we argue that increasing regulative institutions and consumers' expectations encouraged the signaling effects of the social CSR dimension on consumers' engagement behavior. We hypothesize:

H3a: The increasing degree of countries' regulative institutions positively moderates the impact of the per-

ceived social CSR dimension on consumers' engagement behavior across countries.

Regarding the *environmental CSR,* no insights exist either. We assume that increasing regulative institutions increase the effects of this dimension on consumer engagement behavior across nations.

Countries with *higher regulations and laws* place more stringent legal requirements on MNCs' environmental commitment. This forces firms' environmental CSR initiatives and practices that consumers can rely on for their engagement with the MNC (Li et al. 2018). People can see this as passive, low CSR signaling. Regulative institutions ensure that MNCs disclose their environmental initiatives, strengthen their respective signals and increase transparency which likely leads to consumers' engagement (Zimmer and Swoboda 2023). This enhances consumers' knowledge, reduces information asymmetries or may affect a society's development; theoretically, it strengthens the observability of environmental CSR signals as consumer-engaging information by providing value to consumers (Yang et al., 2021). However, we have argued that the perceived environmental CSR dimension does not equally engage consumers in all countries compared to the social CSR dimension. We see strong moderating effects of countries' regulative institutions but reduced consumer expectations regarding MNCs' environmental CSR across nations (Khan et al. 2015). *Weak legal systems* allow MNCs to bypass environmental requirements and CSR initiatives (Li et al. 2018). For consumers it is harder to notice CSR signals, which also may have lower public recognition and less likely engage behavior (Zimmer and Swoboda 2023). This may even represent institutional voids for environmentally oriented firms (Khan et al. 2015). We hypothesize:

H3b: The increasing degree of countries' regulative institutions positively moderates the impact of the perceived environmental CSR dimension on consumers' engagement behavior across countries.

On the *economic CSR,* no empirical insights exist. We argue cross-nationally that increasing rules and laws increase the effects of economic CSR on consumer engagement behavior.

A country's *high regulations and laws* face MNCs with requirements for environmental and social responsibility but may limit MNCs' economic CSR signals and consumer perceptions of them resulting in less engagement behavior. For MNCs, institutional complexity may limit their respective legitimation efforts (due to misunderstandings, different aims of interest groups; Rathert 2016) and increase the costs of economic CSR signals (e.g., in competition with other successful MNCs, experience with stronger impacts of other dimensions, Ioannou and Serafeim 2012). Among consumers, the perception and effect of economic CSR as a strong signal may be limited for various reasons: skepticism about the intentions of MNCs, doubts about their contribution to society wealth or reliance on other dimensions for engagement behavior (Heinberg et al., 2021). We also argue that economic CSR particularly engages consumers in countries with lower *institutional regulations*. That is, MNCs may adopt CSR as a substitute for such institutional voids and may have more freedom in communicating economic CSR signals (Rathert 2016). Consumers may preferably perceive this as their lower level of confidence in national institutions (e.g., for monitoring quality standards; Zimmer and Swoboda 2023). A strong perceived economic CSR dimension may reduce consumers' information asymmetries. Consumers also focus on economic aspects, as they can promote positive economic changes in a society and thus consider engaging with their respective firms (Arli and Lasmono 2010). We argue:

H3c: The increasing degree of countries' regulative institutions negatively moderates the impact of the perceived economic CSR dimension on consumers' engagement behavior across countries.

3. Empirical Study

3.1. Sample

The data originate from a long-term collaboration with an MNC. This German firm provides a range of products globally, including consumer health or skin and beauty care products. Each year, the MNC conducts a survey of up to 1,000 consumers in many countries focusing various topics. Because CSR dimensions are crucial in the sectors they operate in, this firm focused on CSR in 2022 and deployed the survey centrally. We designed the sampling and measurements for the MNC and obtained raw data that has not been previously used in any study conducted in the 26 countries, which were selected according to their importance to the MNC. We verified that no specific CSR events emerged for the MNC in these countries.

Together with a commercial marketing agency, we carried out two pretests. Surveys and scale designs were tested twice in focus groups, which led to a few item adjustments. Pretests held in seven foreign countries (quota sample and panel of N = 250 each) showed satisfying results in terms of face validity and construct equivalence after further item adjustments, along with the reliability and validity of the measures. For the main study, the agency collected data simultaneously in all countries using an internet panel approach with reference to quota selection requirements in each country (average participation rate 68 %). The agency provided the data with a time delay. The public benefit of participation was highlighted, and bonus points were awarded. We assured the quality of the panel by checking instructional manipulations, individualized survey links and straight-line or random clicks.

Country	N	WGI	Country	N	WGI
Argentina	841	42.2	Japan	603	88.7
Australia	768	91.2	Kenya	750	31.6
Belgium	816	84.1	Mexico	908	31.9
Brazil	846	40.8	Netherlands	831	93.7
Canada	780	91.7	Poland	885	66.7
China	863	44.0	Russia	871	26.8
Czech Republic	636	81.8	Slovakia	699	70.7
France	844	81.9	South Africa	651	51.4
Germany	887	89.4	Spain	917	75.5
Greece	871	64.9	Ukraine	831	31.9
Hungary	857	66.9	UK	646	85.9
India	783	47.8	USA	872	79.0
Italy	903	68.8	Vietnam	709	42.3
Total				**20,967**	

Note: WGI = World Governance Indicators, mean of the six indicators.

Tab. 1: Sample

Quota sampling was used, and individuals were selected based on selected criteria (i.e., sex, age and national registration authorities' information in each country). For reasons of cross-country comparability or familiarity with MNCs (Mandler et al. 2021_ENREF_28), the sample was confined to the population of urban areas in developed (emerging) countries aged between 18 and 65 (55) years and with high educational and professional levels. To take part in the survey, respondents had to know the MNC as otherwise the judgements will be not valid.

The sample size consisted of 20,967 respondents (after removing 1,679 Mahalanobis distance-based outliers, *Tab. 1*). Tests indicated nonnormally distributed data, and we employed a maximum likelihood estimation.

3.2. Measurement

The variables at the individual level were measured using a five-point Likert scale (5 = strongly agree to 1 = strongly disagree). For social, environmental and economic CSR, we relied on six items per dimension following scholars (Alvarado-Herrera et al. 2017; Castro-González et al. 2019; Ozkan et al. 2022; *Tab. 2*). Customer engagement behavior was measured with three items (adapted in pretest from Leckie et al. 2021; Pansari and Kumar 2017). A professional translation agency applied parallel blind translation-back-translation with translation checks. Slight item modifications, such as cultural rephrasing, were applied to optimize construct equivalence (Yang et al. 2019).

At the country level, we captured regulative institutions by the six most common dimensions of the World Governance Indicators (Kostova et al. 2020; World Bank 2022). We treated fewer common measurements in stability checks, as well as regulative country distances (i.e., dissimilarities between MNCs' home and host countries).

Age, sex (1/0 = female/male) and familiarity with the MNC (one item-scale "The firm is familiar to me", Steenkamp et al. 2003; Mandler et al. 2021) were controlled at the individual level because they can impact the perception of CSR signals. The number of surveyed individuals by country was controlled at the country level, as uneven numbers could impact the results.

Multilevel requirements were tested, as consumers were grouped in countries. Intraclass correlation showed that 18.1 % of customer engagement behaviors variance was attributable to country-specific differences; multilevel modeling was highly appropriate (Hox et al. 2018, pp. 4–13). The tests of validity and reliability were satisfactory (*Tab. 2*–4).

We tested for variance inflation factors that were below the common threshold of 10. Multicollinearity was not a serious problem as was not multilevel reliability based on multilevel alpha and reliability (Web.Appendix A).[2] We used regression scores for social, environmental, and economic CSR after weighing the validity coefficients of factor score procedures to reduce the complexity of the model.

Common method variance was controlled variously ex-ante. Ex post, a single-factor test produced worse fit values than did the proposed model ($\Delta\chi^2(6) = 12{,}381.394$, $p < .001$). Applying the marker variable technique, we used occupation as a theoretically distinct marker variable (Web.Appendix B). The correlations did not change significantly; less than 7.9 % were attributable to method variances, which is reduced. In this study, CMV was reduced.

Possible biases from omitted variables were addressed by endogeneity following the instrumental variable approach (Hill et al. 2021). For each independent variable, a theoretically related instrumental variable was selected (social dimension: perceived social capability; environmental dimension: perceived environmental credibility; economic dimension: perceived financial performance). Once the strengths of the instrumental variables were established using the F-test, efficient (vs. consistent) models were computed. They were not significantly different, demonstrating the three CSR dimensions' exogeneity (Web.Appendix C).

To ensure that the parameters were measured equally across groups, metric invariances were assured (Web Appendix D). Multilevel measurement invariance was tested by comparing each country (Jak et al. 2013). All factor loadings were considered equal across levels. There was no cluster bias.

	Item	MV/Std	FL	KMO	ItTC	α	CR	AVE	λ
Society	[MNC] has competent staff.	3.79/1.01	.733	.916	.704	.927	.928	.791	.750
	[MNC] helps to promote health and to fight hunger.	3.36/1.14	.801		.768				.799
	[MNC] behaves in an ethically correct manner.	3.45/1.13	.851		.814				.859
	The work of [MNC] brings added value to society.	3.65/1.07	.861		.821				.848
	[MNC] supports good causes.	3.47/1.12	.854		.816				.851
	[MNC] improves people's quality of life in the local community.	3.76/1.07	.840		.802				.838
Environment	[MNC] is capable to successfully to shape environmental future.	3.64/1.07	.768	.924	.740	.933	.934	.765	.793
	[MNC] offers products that are safe for people and the environment.	3.55/1.12	.800		.769				.818
	[MNC] contributes to sustainable development in the world.	3.49/1.14	.861		.826				.869
	[MNC] is environmentally responsible.	3.35/1.15	.875		.837				.869
	[MNC] is at the forefront of climate protection.	3.21/1.16	.836		.802				.814
	[MNC] shows consideration for biodiversity.	3.37/1.12	.871		.834				.852
Economy	[MNC] has strong prospects for continuous growth.	3.81/1.03	.828	.904	.788	.919	.919	.728	.821
	[MNC] strives to gain the long-term trust of its customers.	3.76/1.06	.815		.774				.839
	[MNC] offers high-quality products and services.	3.83/1.02	.837		.794				.838
	[MNC] is a top competitor in its market.	3.84/1.04	.778		.742				.772
	[MNC] is in sound economic health.	3.83/1.01	.780		.744				.767
	[MNC] develops innovative products.	3.79/1.01	.820		.778				.815
Customer Engagement	In the future, I intend to use products and services from [MNC].	3.70/1.15	.869	.737	.783	.877	.877	.708	.862
	If I had the opportunity, I would say something positive about the [MNC].	3.59/1.31	.870		.783				.878
	I would recommend the [MNC] to a friend or colleague.	3.60/1.26	.786		.728				.784

Confirmatory Fit: CFI = .933; RMSEA = .072; Scaling Correction Factor Maximum Likelihood = 1.3457; SRMR = .039; TLI = .923; $\chi^2(183) = 20{,}196.733$.
Note: AVE = Average Variance Extracted (≥ .5); CR = Composite Reliability (≥ .6); FL = Factor Loadings; ItTC = Item-to-Total-Correlation (≥ .5); KMO = Kaiser/Meyer/Olkin (≥ .5); α = Cronbach's Alpha (≥ .7); λ = Standardized Factor Loadings.

Tab. 2: Reliability/Validity

	Society	Environment	Economy	Customer Engagement
Society	**.791**			
Environment	.397	**.765**		
Economy	.341	.378	**.728**	
CEB	.454	.539	.542	**.708**

Note: AVE = Average Variance Extracted (≥ .5) on the diagonal; squared correlations below the diagonal in *italics*.

Tab. 3: Discriminant Validity

3.3. Method

We applied MSEM (Mplus 8.10) for hypothesis tests which considers the hierarchical structure of the data by simultaneously calculating the interactions of variables at country and individual levels. It is appropriate for larger samples across nations, exposes variances within and between countries and specifies latent variables and moderators (Hox et al. 2018, pp. 212–214, 271–274). Large samples are typical for MSEM (Hox et al. 2018,

	(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)		(5)		(6)		(7)	(8)		(9)		(10)
VIF	8.360		6.424		4.211		-		1.002		1.094		1.600	1.100		2.495		2.248
Correlations:																		
SOC (1)	1																	
ENV (2)	.630	***	1															
ECO (3)	.584	***	.615	***	1													
CEB (4)	.674	***	.734	***	.736	***	1											
Sex (5)	-.003	ns	-.003	ns	-.003	ns	-.001	ns	1									
Age (6)	-.056	***	-.102	***	.004	ns	-.097	***	.001	ns	1							
BF (7)	.479	***	.531	***	.598	***	.670	***	-.014	**	-.071	***	1					
CPC (8)														1				
Differences (9)														-.214	***	1		
Distances (10)														.173	***	-.743	***	1

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$; ns = not significant.
Note: BF = Brand Familiarity; CEB = Customer Engagement Behavior; CPC = Consumers per country; ECO = Economy; ENV = Environment; SOC = Society, VIF = Variance Inflation Factor.

Tab. 4: Correlations

pp. 212–214) and improve the power of the test as they are closer to the real-world population; for the effects we interpret b-values and effect sizes as p-values only show statistical significance (Khalilzadeh and Tasci 2017), while the context importance is indicated by the country-level variance explained.

Stepwise random models were computed, calculating baseline models, individual-level controls and all individual-level variables (Hox et al. 2018, p. 41). At each step, estimates and standard errors show which parameters are significant, how much residual error remains and how model quality is based on AIC/BIC (a robust, quick and likely convergent modelling compared to alternatives; Hox et al. 2018, p. 43). For reasons of model complexity, variables were grand-mean centered.

Equation (1) describes the procedure:

$$CEB_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}(SOC_{ij}) + \beta_{2j}(ENV_{ij}) + \beta_{3j}(ECO_{ij}) + \beta_{ILC}ILC_{ij} + r_{ij,} \quad (1)$$

with i = consumers, j = countries, CEB_{ij} = consumer i's **engagement behavior** in country j, SOC_{ij}, ENV_{ij}, ECO_{ij} = consumer perception of social, environmental, economic CSR, ILC_{ij} = individual-level controls, and r_{ij} = first-level error term; intercept β_{0j} and slopes β_{1j}-β_{3j} were allowed to vary across nations.

Level-two models accounted for differences between countries and predict variation in the β coefficients using moderators as predictors:

$$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(CLV_j) + \gamma_{02}(CLC_j) + u_{0j}, \quad (2)$$

$$\beta_{qj} = \gamma_{q0} + \gamma_{q1}(CLV_j) + u_{qj}, \text{ with } q = 1, 3 \quad (3)$$

with γ_{00} = country-level intercept of customer engagement behavior; γ_{10}, γ_{20} = intercepts of the second-level random slopes of CSR dimensions; CLV_j = country-level variables, u_{qj} = country-level residual variances, and CLC_j = control variable at country level.

Equations (1–3) constitute as follows:

$$CEB_{ij} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(CLV_j) + \gamma_{10}(SOC_{ij}) + \gamma_{10}(ENV_{ij}) + \gamma_{10}(ECO_{ij}) + \gamma_{11}(CLV_j)(SOC_{ij}) + \gamma_{11}(CLV_j)(ENV_{ij}) + \gamma_{11}(CLV_j)(ECO_{ij}) + \gamma_{CLC}(CLC_j) + error, \quad (4)$$

3.4. Results

Tab. 5 summarizes the results by showing unstandardized coefficients (only shown in random intercept and slope models, Hox et al. 2018, pp. 17–18) and effect sizes.

The social dimension of CSR cross-nationally positively impacts customer engagement behavior (b = .352, p < .001), supporting *H1a.* In support of *H1b* and *H1c,* the environmental dimension of CSR has a positive effect on customer engagement behavior (b = .198, p < .001), as does the economic dimension (b = .336, p < .001).

The effect of the social dimension is significantly stronger than those of the environmental (t = 25.317, p < .001) and economic dimensions (t = 2.562, p < .05), supporting *H2a and H2b*.

Country differences in *regulative institutions* positively moderate the effects of both social CSR (b = .059, p < .01) and environmental CSR (b = .080, p < .001) on customer engagement behavior across countries. The moderation effect of economic CSR is significantly negative (b = .-090, p < .001). Hypotheses *H3a-c* are supported. The explained country-level variance of the moderator is 80.0 %. A visualization of the moderation slopes for different regulative institutions is shown in *Fig. 3*.

Of our controls, brand familiarity and age are significant, as expected.

3.5. Stability Checks

Alternative models were used to confirm our observations and provide additional insights for this research field.

A random split-half test underlined the robustness of our effects and moderations among both smaller samples (see Web Appendix E.).

We validated our insights on a sample of the three strongest competitors of the MNC in every country chosen by the MNC based on their competitiveness and activity in the same industries (see Web Appendix F). The competitors are MNCs but differ in each country (the largest geographical scope of individual MNCs is 15 countries; thus, it is methodologically not fully sufficient to merge them). We used the same methods for this sample. The findings are stable regarding the effects of social (b = .368, p < .001), environmental (b = .188, p < .001) and economic CSR (b = .343, p < .001) and regarding the moderators (social b = .057, p < .01, environmental b = .067, p < .001, economic b = -.091, p < .001). Thus, our insights are supported.

As studies consider CSR as one construct (e.g., Castro-González et al. 2019), we tested a model with CSR as a second-order construct of the dimensions (following established procedures, e.g., Finn and Wang 2014). CSR in general engages consumers (b = .808, p < .001), and a positive moderation of regulative institutions emerges (b = .050, p < .001; explaining 81.3 % of country-level variance, Web Appendix F). This finding is consistent with previous findings (Zimmer and Swoboda 2023). However, the strong effects of CSR dimensions and the different moderations of regulative institutions are omitted.

We tested the moderations of less- frequently used measures of regulative institutions (see Web Appendix F). The findings for the Economic Freedom Index are similar (b = .004, *p* < .01; b = .005, *p* < .001; b = -.005, *p* < .001); however, they explain 60.0 % of country-level variance. For the Global Competitiveness Report, two moderators are stable (b = .019, *p* > .10; b = .075,

		Random intercept						Random intercept and slope					
		Null model	Baseline model	Full model				Baseline model	Difference tests	Cross-level interactions			
				b *p*	b *p*	b *p*	b *p*	b *p*		b *p*	b *p*	b *p*	b *p*
	Main relationship individual level												
Society	→ CEB			.771 ***			.352 ***	.352 ***	$t_{Soc\text{-}Env}$=25.317***	.354 ***	.353 ***	.352 ***	.354 ***
				(1.58)			(.722)	(.722)		(.726)	(.724)	(.722)	(.726)
Environ-ment	→ CEB				.730 ***		.197 ***	.198 ***	$t_{Env\text{-}Eco}$=15.830***	.197 ***	.196 ***	.196 ***	.195 ***
					(1.50)		(.402)	(.407)		(.404)	(.403)	(.403)	(.401)
Economy	→ CEB					.780 ***	.336 ***	.336 ***	$t_{Eco\text{-}Soc}$=2.562*	.334 ***	.336 ***	.337 ***	.336 ***
						(1.59)	(.686)	(.686)		(.681)	(.686)	(.688)	(.686)
	Cross-level interactions												
Regulative Difference	→ Intercept CEB									-.151 ***			
										(-.238)			
	→ Slope Society									.070 ***			
										(.110)			
	→ Intercept CEB										-.151 ***		
											(-.238)		
	→ Slope Envi-ronment										.090 ***		
											(.142)		
	→ Intercept CEB											-.150 ***	
												(-.237)	
	→ Slope Economy											-.074 ***	
												(-.117)	
	→ Intercept CEB												-.152 ***
													(-.240)
	→ Slope Society												.059 **
													(.093)
	→ Slope Environ-ment												.080 ***
													(.126)
	→ Slope Economy												-.090 ***
													(-.142)
	Covariates individual level												
Sex	→ CEB		.020 ns	.007 ns	.010 ns	.014 ns	.008 ns	.008 ns		.008 ns	.008 ns	.008 ns	.008 ns
Age	→ CEB		.012 †	.002 ns	.020 ***	-.035	-.010 *	-.010 *		-.010 *	-.009 *	-.010 *	-.009 *

Tab. 5: Results

Familiarity → CEB		.448 ***	.125 ***	.150 ***	.098 ***	.068 ***	.068 ***	.069 ***	.068 ***	.068 ***	.068 ***
Covariates country level											
CPC → CEB							.001 *	.000 ns	.000 ns	.000 ns	.000 ns
Residual variance (individual level)	.820	.582	.200	.237	.247	.168	.168	.168	.168	.168	.168
Residual variance (country level)	.182	.182	.035	.034	.029	.019	.015	.009	.009	.009	.003
Explained variance (individual level)		29.0%	65.6%	59.3%	57.6%	71.1%	0.0%				
Explained variance (country level)							21.1%	40.0%	40.0%	40.0%	80.0%
AIC	162,996.673	157,024.448	257,048.689	259,388.216	259,716.839	138,980.924	138,978.391	138,939.359	138,927.541	138,935.473	138,906.196
BIC (adjusted)	163,068.264	157,110.357	257,163.235	259,502.761	259,831.385	139,095.470	139,097.710	139,068.223	139,056.405	139,064.337	139,044.606

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001; ns=not significant; b=unstandardized coefficients; brackets=effect sizes.
Note: CEB=Customer Engagement Behavior; CPC=Consumers per cluster.

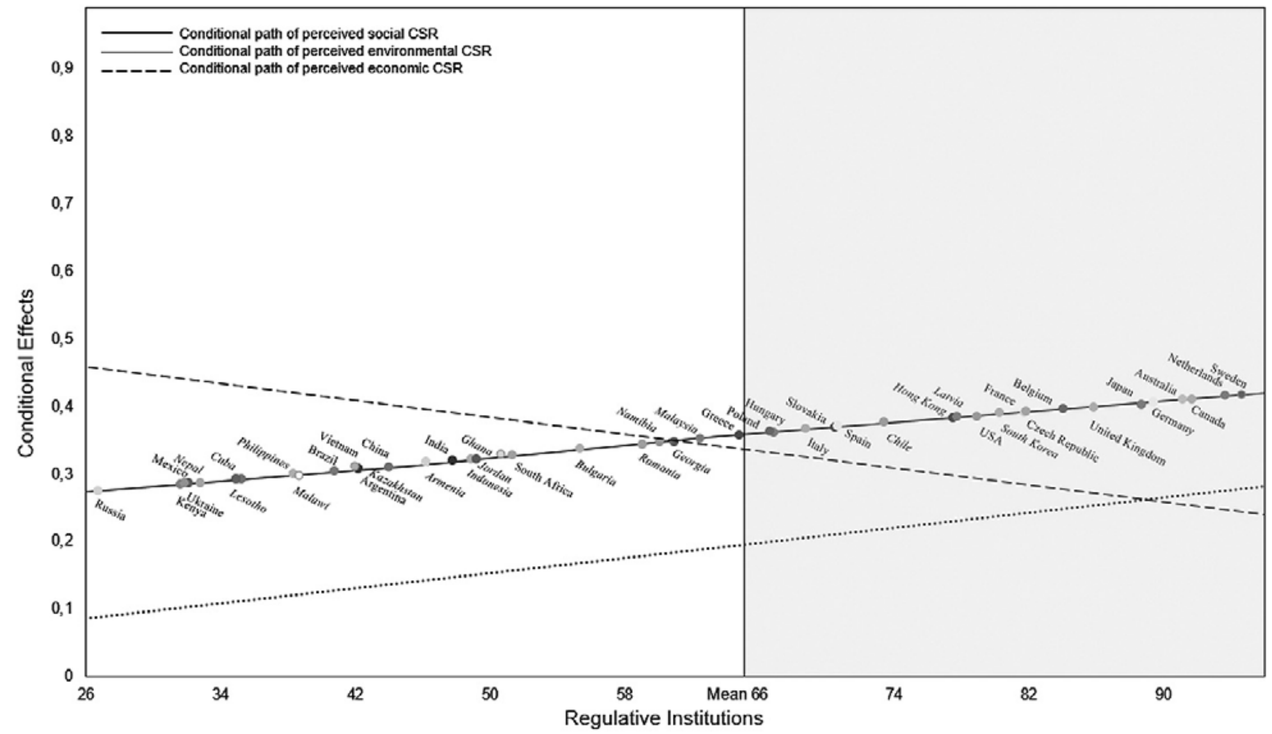
Tab. 5 (continued)

$p < .001$; b = -.068, $p < .001$); the explained country-level variance is 66.7 %. The lower explained variances provide additional support for the relevance of the chosen World Governance Indicators.

We were interested in the role of regulative distances, as MNCs have a less clear understanding of rules and laws in distant markets and more difficulties operating appropriately there, e.g., due to different consumer expectations. For consumers, CSR signals may be less strong due to the greater ambiguity faced by MNCs and may be less engaging because they are less in line with expectations (Swoboda et al. 2017). We used the World Governance Indicators and calculated the Mahalanobis distances from MNCs' homes to their host countries (Kostova et al. 2020). Our findings show that consumers become aware of regulative distances as the effects of the social and environmental CSR dimensions are weakened (b = -.028, $p < .100$; b = -.045, $p < .001$), while those of the economic dimension are strengthened (b = .048, $p < .001$; Web Appendix F). We conclude that regulative distances are less important than country differences, as the explained country-level variance is 40.0 %.

We tested the moderating role of country development, which cross-nationally strongly moderates the effects of CSR in general (Zimmer and Swoboda 2023). We measured country development with the most common Human Development Index (Kostova et al. 2020) and derived the data from United Nations Development Programme (2022). The effects of the social (b = .490, p < .001) and environmental CSR dimensions (b = .374, p < .001) are enhanced with an increasing degree of country development, while those of the economic dimension are weakened (b = -.401, p < .001; Web Appendix F). The country-level variance explained is 80.0 % (underlining insights into overall CSR, Zimmer and Swoboda 2023). However, regulative institutions can adapt more quickly and offer MNCs or public stakeholders better guidance than country development, which is why they represent a better orientation for country-specific adjustments to CSR effects, for example.

We tested national culture, as it was most often mentioned as a possible moderator in international studies on CSR (e.g., Diallo et al. 2021). We relied on Schwartz's (2014) three-dimension cultural model, which is superior to other approaches (e.g., Siegel et al. 2013). Embeddedness (i.e., social relations between individuals and groups) diminishes social and environmental but enhances economic CSR effects and explains 60.0 % of country-level variance (underlining its weaker role in the effects of overall CSR, Zimmer and Swoboda 2023; Web Appendix F). Also consistently, hierarchy (i.e., hierarchical systems of assigned roles) and mastery (i.e., self-assertion by individuals to control, manage and change the environment) only moderate the effects of social CSR (no further dimension) and explain 6.7–13.3 % of country-level variance.



Note: The graph indicates the 26 countries investigated in this study, further 20 countries in *italics*. The grey box indicates, starting from the mean of regulative institutions, in which countries MNCs can best use take advantage of perceived social and environmental CSR in terms of customer engagement behavior, while they can best take advantage of perceived economic CSR in countries outside the box.

Fig. 3: Portfolio

4. Discussion

Scholars have encouraged research on the effects of multidimensional CSR beyond national borders (e.g., Lim et al. 2022). We follow them and examine how MNCs' social, environmental, and economic CSR dimensions influence customer engagement behavior across nations by providing theoretical rationales and by underlining a dominant moderation of countries' regulative institutions. The results provide direct guidelines for MNCs' marketing and public stakeholders in dealing with dimensional CSR impacts and applicable regulations from a consumer perspective.

4.1. Theoretical Contributions

The results of our *original research question* contribute particularly to the majority of international studies that analyze the effects of perceived CSR on consumer behavior as one construct (e.g., comparing few countries or across nations; Diallo et al. 2021; Zimmer and Swoboda 2023). For this stream, we propose a further conceptualization based on the sustainable development approach and provide novel theoretical rationales and empirical insights into cross-nationally different impacts of perceived CSR dimensions on the increasing important consumers' engagement behavior for MNCs. Obviously, these studies omit valuable broader theorization even if overall CSR is measured based on the three dimensions. We also contribute to national studies that partly found insignificant relationships between CSR dimensions and consumer responses in single countries (e.g., Al-Haddad et al. 2022; Currás-Pérez et al. 2018; Jung et al. 2020; Ozkan et al. 2022) and especially to the few and inconclusive international studies, which alternately see the social or environmental or economic CSR dimensions as the strongest (Contini et al. 2020; Marquina and Morales 2012; Singh et al. 2008). This may be due to the countries selected for comparison. However, we enable a certain generalization across nations, i.e., for engagement behavior, for our focal MNC and for competitors in stability checks. The strongest effect of the social CSR dimension can be explained by this signal, and consumer engagement behavior shares a common referent through social elements (e.g., Allen et al. 2007). This leads to a more intimate relational connection to MNCs (Leckie et al. 2021). However, this is somewhat surprising considering the focus on environmental CSR and has implications for MNCs' marketing and public stakeholders, which we practically address. We also show a stronger effect of the economic (vs. environmental) CSR due to possibly greater observability of this signal. Thus, we further contribute to the application of signaling theory and signaling environment (following Heinberg et al. 2021; Magnusson et al. 2015; Zimmer and Swoboda 2023).

Regarding our *main research question*, we expand our knowledge with insights into regulative institutions as continuous moderators of all-dimensional CSR effects in at least three respects.

First, management CSR studies has shown that regulative institutions are positively associated with MNCs' CSR responsiveness while their sales growth is higher within weaker legal institutions (e.g., El Ghoul et al., 2017; Young & Makhija, 2014). Consumer studies to which we contribute have assumed the relevance of national rules and laws for multidimensional CSR but have not analyzed them (e.g., Luger et al. 2022). They have discussed governmental options to directly influence firms and their transparency or indirectly shape local individual/societal behavior (Heinberg et al. 2021). This study supports these assumptions and underlines the role of regulative institutions as the most relevant signaling environment (e.g., compared to national culture in stability checks and consistent with insights on overall CSR; Zimmer and Swoboda 2023).

Second, this study provides novel theoretical rationales that regulative institutions differently affect MNCs' CSR initiatives considering consumers' responses to dimensional CSR signals. Regulative institutions favor certain dimensions; cross-national effects of the strongest and weakest social and environmental CSR signals are reinforced by regulative institutions, while economic CSR signals are weakened. Social CSR, for example, theoretically better fits consumer expectations because increasing regulations and laws force MNCs to comply with their individual society (Khan et al. 2015). The roles of regulative institutions differ among countries; in countries with high regulations and laws, dominant social CSR signals are reinforced, while in countries with low regulations, economic CSR signals gain dominance. In the latter social CSR signals are less observable for consumers (firms, societies or governments are free to shape social issues, Li et al. 2018), while economic signals are strong due to their value character or respective consumer associations (Ozkan et al. 2022). All of this indicates certain trade-offs for MNCs aiming to manage CSR dimensions in ways that benefit their performance (engaging consumers) and meeting societal aims. Both require country-specific CSR initiatives, at least specific marketing of even centrally at headquarters-managed CSR dimensions. Finally, regulative distances were shown to be relevant but weaker.

Third, this study contributes to the knowledge of policymakers, as regulative institutions influence the engagement behavior of local consumers and thus of a society, especially in response to social CSR signals. In contrast, the limited capacity or willingness of policymakers in certain countries allows MNCs to forego implementing CSR practices that go beyond economic CSR signals from the perspective of local consumers (Khan et al. 2015). Rules and laws are helpful, especially since they can change more quickly than other national institutions. They likely limit MNCs' economic activities but increase the importance of CSR signals regarding the welfare and interests of societies and, more gradually, the natural environment.

4.2. Practical Implications

This work adds to a practical understanding of how consumers respond to CSR dimensions, i.e., enables the prediction of consumer engagement with MNCs' through dimensional CSR efforts. For decision makers at the headquarter level, for example, this work underlines that consumers emphasize the social CSR dimension over others when aiming to manage their CSR in a way that benefits their competitive advantages by engaging consumers and their societal concerns. Without this understanding, an MNC may implement CSR activities in ways that fail to generate such engagements (Barbarossa et al. 2022). Also politicians and supranational environmental organizations notice that all CSR efforts of MNCs engage consumers (supporting efforts to achieve greater sustainability) but that, perhaps surprisingly, cross-nationally, the environmental CSR dimension has the weakest effect from a consumer perspective. The welfare and interests of society, i.e., engaging consumers in societal causes, have priority over those of natural systems. If desired, politicians must promote the latter by influencing MNCs or, in the longer term, consumers and thus societies.

The focus on regulative institutions provides direct implications resulting from reinforcing (weakening) the strongest social and economic CSR dimensions. However, this indicates trade-offs, as moderations with reverse directions does not mean focusing only one dimension but rather tackling different dimensions to engage consumers in a country. *Fig. 3* provides country-specific guidelines.

- The perceived *social CSR dimension,* as the strongest or expectation-fitting signal, is particularly effective for consumer engagement in countries such as Sweden, Japan, or the USA. An MNC's focus on, and communication of respective CSR initiatives is beneficial here.
- The perceived *economic CSR dimension* is most influential in countries with lower levels of regulative institutions, such as Kenya, China, or India. The CSR engagements of consumers and their societal causes can be better achieved here through economic CSR initiatives.

Moreover, local and supranational lawmakers or nongovernmental organizations may certify strong dimensional signals of MNCs in comparison to those provided through greenwashing, thus increasing the engagement behavior of consumers in societies while simultaneously emphasizing that MNCs benefit from CSR, especially through the social dimension. MNCs particularly rewarded by consumers for being socially responsible may be motivated to take voluntary CSR initiatives. These, in turn, engage consumers and societies. Proactive MNCs may even encourage governments to monitor dimensional CSR signals locally and to promote/provide incentives for CSR (Magnusson et al. 2015).

5. Limitations and Further Research

Certain limitations of this study provide guidance for research.

A sampling expansion would allow further conclusions to be drawn. To do so, the examination of other industries or local firms that symbolize closer connections to communities with social CSR initiatives is necessary (Eisingerich et al. 2023; Ozkan et al. 2022). Longitudinal or experimental studies would contribute to research (e.g., Aramburu and Pescador 2019; Chu et al. 2020).

Methodologically we refer to the sustainable development approach for strong reasons but it would be interesting to study the effects of further CSR dimensions or perceptions of further stakeholders (Kumar and Srivastava 2022; Öberseder et al. 2013). As usual, we capture customer engagement behavior unidimensionally, while second-order alternatives are conceivable (e.g., comprising consumers' social and further feedback and loyalty). We are restricted to pretested etic scales (due to requirements of a number of the countries studied or item comparability), whereas emic measures could increase construct equivalence but are nearly impossible to establish across many countries (Yang et al. 2019).

Extending our conceptual framework is permissible but methodologically challenging in MSEM. Conceptualizing further outcome variables (e.g., consumers' repurchases; Vera-Martínez et al. 2022), mediating variables such as MNCs' reputation or consumers' trust (e.g., to study mechanisms of CSR dimensions; Aramburu and Pescador 2019; Zimmer and Swoboda 2023) and signaling environments such as social media use or CSR investments would be interesting. New methods that enable environmental orientation to be weighted are needed because, for example, seven of the world's 15 largest CO2-emitting countries show enormous CO2 increases.

Notes

[1] We conducted a literature review in 45 journals (following Harzing's journal A-B quality list) for keywords such as CSR, CSR dimensions, green, or ethicality (for empirical studies since 2005 and cross-citations).

[2] See Web Appendix: https://adobe.ly/4aljkQ4.

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