

“I Care Where You Come From”: Testing the Conditional Moderated Mediation of Country-of-Origin Effect in Multinational Enterprises’ Corporate Social Responsibility Communication

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In today’s polarized global environment, multinational enterprises’ (MNEs) performances are more prone to the influence of the host country stakeholders’ animosity toward their country of origin (COO). In seeking social legitimacy, MNEs often use corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs as a relationship-building strategy in host countries. Drawing on the COO research and attribution theory, this study attempts to reveal how animosity influences host country stakeholders’ attributions of CSR motives and their subsequent evaluations of organization-public relationships with MNEs. In addition, CSR fit and individual ethnocentrism are tested as moderators. An online survey with 671 participants recruited from China supports the proposed conditional moderated mediation model. This study bears theoretical significance to public relations, CSR communication, and COO research. Managerial implications for MNEs are discussed.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility, country of origin, animosity, fit, corporate social responsibility motive, attribution bias, contingency organization-public relationships

Multinational enterprises’ (MNEs’) operations in host countries are generally confronted with the liability of foreignness, which indicates that host country stakeholders may use stereotypes or impose stricter criteria to judge MNEs compared with local companies (Eden & Miller, 2010). To cope with the liability of foreignness, many MNEs turn to enhancing social contributions to the host country in the form of corporate social responsibility (CSR; Campbell, Eden, & Miller, 2012). Evidence shows that CSR lends help to MNEs by improving their legitimacy to operate in the host country and obtaining more customer engagement (Liu, Wu, Ko, Chen, & Chen, 2019).

As an important venue for acquiring social legitimacy, effective CSR communications become more important for MNEs’ survivability and performance in host countries. However, there is a void of research in how much the country of origin (COO) affects MNEs’ CSR communication outcomes in host countries and through what mechanisms. More effective CSR strategies to alleviate the negative COO associations that hamper CSR performances are yet to be quantitatively examined. To address this gap, the current study turns to the COO perspective from marketing research to examine how animosity toward an MNE’s COO

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(hereafter animosity) affects stakeholders' attributions of CSR motives and their subsequent evaluations of relationships with the MNE (Klein, Ettenson, & Morris, 1998).

Stakeholders' process of attributing motives to CSR activities is convoluted by the confounding social milieu (Ogunfowora, Stackhouse, & Oh, 2018). As such, COO is one of the extrinsic attributes of MNEs' CSR programs exerting subtle influences on host country stakeholders' evaluations of CSR motives, depending on how "hostile" (i.e., how much animosity) stakeholders felt toward an MNE's COO. Drawing on the literature on group-based attribution bias (Fiske & Taylor, 1991), this study proposes that animosity affects stakeholders' attributions of intrinsic and extrinsic CSR motives differently, which further determines their evaluations of organization-public relationships (OPRs). Additionally, two moderators at the corporate-strategy level (i.e., CSR fit) and at the individual-trait level (i.e., ethnocentrism) are also considered to further parse the conditional effects of animosity.

To fulfill the research purpose, an online survey was conducted in the context of the 2021 Henan record-breaking flood disaster in China. In this context, Chinese publics' responses toward CSR campaigns by MNEs of various home countries help elucidate the COO effects in CSR communications. The results of the study will advance the CSR communication scholarship by integrating strategic CSR communications with the COO perspective from marketing literature and further the theoretical understanding of the intricate relationship between CSR communication process and organization-public relationship building. In addition, under the current conflicting global environment, this study offers significant managerial implications for MNEs seeking to improve social legitimacy by investing in CSR activities in host countries.

COO, Animosity, and OPRs

In marketing research, COO is an important part of the branding bundle. As part of brand-related associations, COO inevitably affects consumers' judgments of products and attitudes toward brands (Ettenson & Gaeth, 1991). Klein and colleagues (1998) first constructed the animosity model of foreign product purchase to capture the negative effects of aversive COO on consumer purchase behaviors. Referencing the sociology studies of animosity, consumer animosity is defined as "remnants of antipathy related to previous or ongoing military, political, or economic events which affect consumer purchase behavior in the international marketplace" (Klein et al., 1998, p. 90). Animosity can be attributed to multiple reasons, such as military events, diplomatic disputes, and economic rivalry among MNEs' host and home countries. The original measurement scale of animosity was composed of two subdimensions of war animosity and economic animosity between the host country and the home country of an MNE (Klein et al., 1998), which were further extended to include culturally and religiously motivated animosity (Kalliny, Hausman, & Saran, 2014; Kalliny, Minton, & Benmamoun, 2018).

Since the introduction of consumer animosity, numerous studies have established the strong predictive power of the construct on different types of consumer decisions (Antonetti, Manika, & Katsikeas, 2019; Wang, Tang, Stewart, & Paik, 2023). Animosity can cause affective (e.g., negative emotions), cognitive (negative corporate ability judgment), and behavioral responses (e.g., reduced social media engagement) among various stakeholder groups. Extending the scope of consumer animosity research, this

study proposes that animosity will have a direct influence on the relationship between a multinational organization and its stakeholders in host countries.

Organization-public relationships are defined as interdependent relationships that describe the degree to which a stakeholder trust, agree on, commit to, and feel favorably toward the organization (Huang, 2001). Cheng (2018) attempted to capture the changing dynamism in the relationship between an organization and its publics by postulating the contingent OPR (COPR) concept. The COPR stated that predisposing factors, such as the characteristics of the companies and the publics' personal traits and situational factors, such as urgent crisis outbreaks, are the contingency factors that influence publics' stances when dealing with the companies (Cheng & Fisk, 2022). In this light, publics' evaluations of OPR are subject to the influence of the companies' COO as a predisposing factor. In addition, consumer animosity may also fluctuate in response to the ever-evolving tensions among countries, which constitutes a situational factor casting influence on OPR. In fact, scholars have already found that animosity significantly predicts corporate trust among consumers, which is an important subdimension of OPR (Jiménez & San Martín, 2010). Thus, adding to the animosity outcomes reviewed previously in this section, it is proposed that animosity also engenders the relational outcome of OPR.

H1: Animosity negatively affects OPR.

CSR Motives and Attribution Bias

As suggested by the attribution theory (Kelley, 1973), stakeholders' favorability toward a CSR program is contingent on the attributions made regarding the companies' motives. A plethora of research has well documented the role of CSR motive attribution as a psychological mechanism underlying stakeholders' internalization of CSR communications (e.g., Kim & Lee, 2012; Kim, Oh, & Ham, 2022). According to the attribution theory, CSR attributions have a dichotomous typology of being intrinsically motivated or extrinsically motivated. Intrinsic CSR motivations are also referred to as public-serving motives (e.g., Kim & Lee, 2012), prosocial motives (e.g., Song & Ferguson, 2023), altruistic motives (e.g., Choi, Chang, Li, & Jang, 2016), and value-driven motives (e.g., Ellen, Webb, & Mohr, 2006). The intrinsic CSR motive attribution indicates that stakeholders believe companies engage in CSR activities purely for the benefit of the overall good of society regardless of the companies' self-interest. Contrarily, extrinsic CSR motivations, also named self-serving motives, self-interest motives, or egoistic motives (Vlachos, Tsamakos, Vrechopoulos, & Avramidis, 2009), indicate that firms exploit social causes through CSR activities to achieve competitive advantages and business goals, instead of being driven by good corporate morality and business ethics. Scholars have also proposed other motives such as strategy-driven CSR (Vlachos et al., 2009), performance-driven (Maignan & Ralston, 2002), and stakeholder-driven (Ellen et al., 2006) motives that stand in between the intrinsic and extrinsic dichotomy.

Previous studies have suggested that peripheral cues about the corporations significantly affect stakeholders' CSR attributions (Tarabashkina, Tarabashkina, & Quester, 2020). Accordingly, COO serves as a peripheral cue for stakeholders' CSR attribution judgments. Due to attribution bias, the level of animosity toward a company's COO will impact stakeholders' judgments of CSR attributions. According to Fiske and Taylor (1991), bias exists when individuals try to assign credit and blame to meet the need to protect one's self-concept and

self-esteem. Studies have shown that cues related to social groups will substantially bias individuals' judgments and behaviors (Taber & Lodge, 2006). Individuals are more likely to attribute positive characters and outcomes to their in-groups and negative characters and outcomes to out-groups. A similar group-based attribution bias affects stakeholders' attribution of motives behind the CSR. As animosity increases, the group-based attribution bias should be more salient. Since intrinsic CSR motives are commonly acknowledged as morally outstanding characteristics, a stronger feeling of animosity toward a multinational company's home country, accompanied by stronger group-based attribution bias, should reduce the tendency to attribute intrinsic CSR motives. Likewise, extrinsic CSR attributions connote that the foreign company commits to CSR for reasons centered around self-interest, such as increasing market share, making profits, and conforming to stakeholder pressure, instead of being a good corporate citizen. Therefore, a stronger feeling of animosity should trigger more attribution bias, which generates more external CSR attributions to foreign companies originating from "hostile" countries.

H2: Animosity has a significant impact on motive attributions. Specifically, animosity (a) negatively affects intrinsic motive attribution and (b) positively affects extrinsic motive attribution.

CSR Motive Attribution and OPR

Existing literature disagrees on how intrinsic and extrinsic CSR motive attributions influence CSR outcomes. Typically, stakeholders have a distinct preference for intrinsic CSR motives and tend to punish firms with extrinsic CSR motive attributions. Intrinsic CSR motive attributions are associated with higher perceived CSR authenticity and more favorable reactions from stakeholders (Wut & Ng, 2022), whereas extrinsic CSR motive attributions are often challenged by stakeholder skepticism and cynicism (Forehand & Grier, 2003). However, other studies have shown that the effects of intrinsic and extrinsic CSR motive attributions are also contingent on additional factors. For example, Song and Ferguson (2023) found that the congruence of stakeholders' individual prosocial motivations and CSR attributions are determinants of their subsequent supportive behaviors toward CSR programs. Kim and Lee (2012) also stated that publics acknowledge the fact that companies must make a business case from CSR investment. If the CSR efforts have a substantial positive impact on public interest, stakeholders are willing to accept companies' extrinsic CSR motives and even reward the companies with reputational credits. As argued by Maignan and Ralston (2002), the business strategy-driven CSR motives are not completely "evil" because economic goals are legitimate pursuits of for-profit organizations and a company's most fundamental responsibility is economic responsibility (Carroll, 2016). Thus, the current study proposes that both intrinsic and extrinsic CSR motives should have positive effects on CSR outcomes, in this case, OPR. Moreover, intrinsic CSR attributions should elicit more favorable responses than extrinsic CSR attributions. Therefore, this study hypothesizes the following:

H3: Both intrinsic and extrinsic motives positively affect OPR. However, intrinsic motive attribution has a significantly stronger positive impact on OPR than extrinsic motive attribution.

CSR Fit

CSR fit refers to the extent to which an issue or cause in the CSR programs is congruent with a company's businesses, products or services, target publics, and company image (Becker-Olsen, Cudmore,

& Hill, 2006). Based on the congruence theory, extant research suggested that high-fit CSR programs are likely to elicit more favorable attitudinal and behavioral responses from stakeholders (Gilal, Paul, Gilal, & Gilal, 2020). However, high-fit CSR programs would not always yield positive results especially when companies could benefit from disassociating CSR programs from their companies' products, services, or images (Song, Wen, & Ferguson, 2020). For example, Austin and Gaither (2019) found that a high-fit CSR program for a stigmatized company (i.e., a cola company with an anti-obesity program) would heighten CSR skepticism, which leads to negative behavioral intentions toward the company. Therefore, it is reasonable to anticipate that CSR fit would function as a moderator on CSR communication outcomes for MNEs characterized by COO and different levels of animosity.

Literature suggested that CSR fit influences how stakeholders attribute motives to CSR activities, and the effect was different between controversial and noncontroversial industries. Ellen and colleagues (2006) found that for normal industries, high-fit CSR programs were positively associated with value and strategy-driven CSR motives and negatively associated with egoistic CSR motives. However, when the nature of the business is controversial, stigmatized, or harmful to society, low-fit CSR programs generated higher levels of intrinsic CSR attributions than high-fit CSR programs, which further mediated the effect of CSR fit on attitudinal and word-of-mouth intentions toward companies (Lee & Cho, 2022). It is hypothesized that the moderating effect of fit on CSR motive attributions is consistent with the findings in the existing literature focusing on normal industries, that is,

H4: Fit moderates the impact of animosity on (a) intrinsic motive and (b) extrinsic motive attributions, such that the effect of animosity is significantly weaker when fit is high compared with when fit is low.

Individual Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism was originally the technical name for the view of things in which one's own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it (Sumner, 2019). Subsequently, Shimp and Sharma (1987) introduced the concept of consumer ethnocentrism tendencies denoting consumers' beliefs about the morality of purchasing goods manufactured by foreign countries, especially when consumers believe their personal or national well-being to be threatened by imports (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). Highly ethnocentric consumers believe that purchasing foreign products is inappropriate and unpatriotic because it harms the national economy, resulting in a loss of jobs. Previous researchers have found that consumer ethnocentrism is negatively related to consumers' perceptions of foreign product quality and purchase intention toward all imported products (De Nisco, Massi, & Papadopoulos, 2020; Sharma, 2015). According to Souiden, Ladhari, and Chang (2018), Chinese consumers have developed a stronger sense of ethnocentrism in recent years due to nationalist pride and a desire for international recognition. Preferences for domestic products and confidence in the "made-in-China" label have dramatically increased as China demonstrates rising national economic power and mega-Chinese companies acquire famous foreign brands (Parker, Haytko, & Hermans, 2011). Thus, the concept becomes highly relevant in the context of the Chinese market.

Klein and colleagues (1998) stated the distinctions between animosity and ethnocentrism. Consumer ethnocentrism tendencies represent the general beliefs held by consumers about the appropriateness or even morality of purchasing imported foreign goods, whereas animosity is a country-specific construct that cannot be generalized to all foreign goods. A consumer with low ethnocentrism could generally accept imported products but still avoid products from a specific country, to which they feel high animosity.

Previous research set forth another distinction between ethnocentrism and animosity regarding their influence on product evaluations. The ethnocentrism tendency and prejudice against foreign products cause consumers to perceive and evaluate domestic products more favorably than foreign products, which leads to stronger purchasing intentions for domestic products (Strizhakova, Coulter, & Price, 2012), whereas animosity can directly affect consumers' purchasing behaviors independent of product judgment (Klein, 2002). In certain cases, even when consumers consider products from a certain country to be of high quality, they may still avoid or even boycott these products due to their anger toward the exporting country (Cheah, Phau, Kea, & Huang, 2016).

Since the two constructs are theoretically related, yet conceptually different, many studies have examined the relationships between the two factors when predicting consumers' responses toward foreign products from specific countries. There is no consensus yet about the causal sequence between the two constructs—with some scholars proposing ethnocentrism being the antecedent to animosity (Narang, 2016; Souiden et al., 2018) and others postulating the causal effect of ethnocentrism on animosity (De Nisco et al., 2020). Regardless, it is generally accepted that the two constructs are correlated and function in conjunction to predict subsequent mediators and dependent variables in different research contexts (Shoham, Gavish, & Rose, 2016).

Notably, existing studies presented inconsistent results as to how the two constructs interact with each other. Mishra, Shukla, Malhotra, and Arora (2023) suggested that consumer animosity was not a significant moderator for the effect of consumer ethnocentrism on purchase intentions among Indian consumers (considering products imported from China). However, Lwin, Stanaland, and Williams (2010) found a significant interaction effect between country-specific animosity and ethnocentrism on consumers' attitudes toward advertisement messages featuring indigenous or foreign cultural symbols. In this study, it was proposed that ethnocentrism, as an individual dispositional trait functions as a moderator for the effect of animosity on CSR motive attributions. Previous studies have documented that individual traits can affect CSR motive attributions. For example, Choi and colleagues (2016) suggested that collectivistic culture-oriented consumers are more likely to attribute intrinsic CSR motive to domestic firms than individualistic-oriented consumers. Likewise, ethnocentrism is also likely to affect stakeholders' inferences of foreign companies' CSR motives by either attenuating or accentuating the effect of animosity, given its conceptual and theoretical link to animosity. Specifically, it is proposed that high levels of ethnocentrism will accentuate the effect of animosity, such that the buffering effect of a high CSR fit, as hypothesized in H4, will be weakened; whereas when the level of ethnocentrism is low, the buffering effect of a high CSR fit will be more salient.

H5: Individual ethnocentrism moderates the interaction effects of animosity and fit on (a) intrinsic motive and (b) extrinsic motive attributions, such that the interaction of animosity and fit is significantly weaker when ethnocentrism is high compared with when ethnocentrism is low.

Lastly, based on the previous hypotheses, a three-way moderated mediation model is proposed (Figure 1).

H6: (a) Intrinsic motive and (b) extrinsic motive attributions mediate the three-way interaction effect of animosity, fit, and ethnocentrism on OPR.

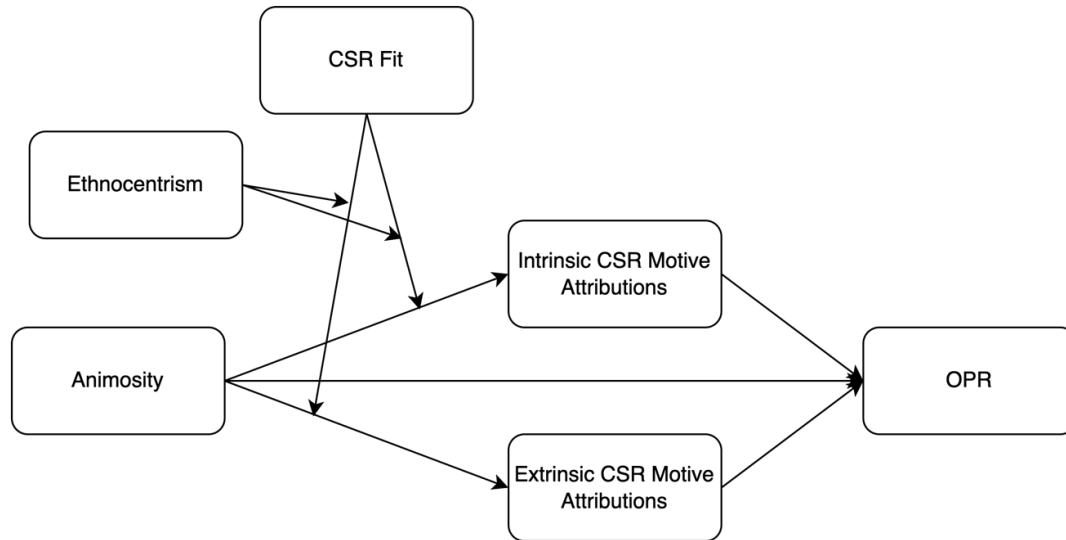


Figure 1. Conceptual model.

Method

Sample

An online survey was administered via Qualtrics in October 2022 to test the hypotheses. Participants were recruited from an online consumer panel company (Zhijue Education Inc.), which specializes in consumer panel research in Mainland China. Quota sampling strategy was used to represent the gender and age compositions of Chinese consumers. In total, 1,049 panelists entered the survey in two weeks. The incomplete responses and those that failed any of the four attention-check questions were filtered out. After data cleaning, 671 complete responses were retained for data analysis. There were 345 female consumers (51.41%) and 324 male consumers (48.29%), with an average age of 30.09 years ($SD = 7.98$), ranging from 18 to 62. Participants' educational levels varied. The majority of the participants held a bachelor's degree (330; 49.2%), followed by those with an associate degree or equivalent (128; 19.1%). One hundred and nine (16.2%) participants had a high-school diploma or lower. Seventy-six (11.3%) participants reported having a master's degree or higher. Regarding regions of living, the number of participants living in the first, second, third, fourth, and fifth tiers of cities were, respectively, 112 (16.7%), 228 (34.0%), 188 (28%), 92 (13.7%), and 36 (5.4%). Another 15 (2.2%) participants lived in rural areas.

Survey Procedure

First, participants read a recap of the 2021 Henan flood (CNN, 2021). In July 2021, Henan province was battered by deadly floods, causing 378 deaths and 120 billion yuan of economic damage. More than 12 million citizens were affected by the disaster. Soon after the disaster, hundreds of companies from various industries engaged in disaster relief with monetary and in-kind donations as part of their CSR efforts. After the recap, the participants were randomly assigned to read one of the six international apparel companies' donation messages and answer the main questionnaire. The six groups' data were later aggregated in data analysis to ensure a normal distribution of consumer animosity in the main data analysis.

These companies were selected based on their (1) COO (representing various degrees of consumer animosity), (2) belonging to a noncontroversial industry with enough multinational companies actively conducting business in the Chinese market, (3) having adequate and comparable customer bases for data collection validity, (4) participation in the Henan disaster-relief CSR activities, (5) having comparable campaign magnitude so that overly large or small donations skewing the results could be avoided, and (6) having Weibo messages that were comparable in terms of informativeness, word count, and message template. The six companies selected were Nike (the United States), PUMA (Germany), UNIQLO (Japan), H&M (Switzerland), ZARA (Spain), and MLB (South Korea). Based on a pilot study with 40 participants recruited from the same panel company as the main study, the six companies had no significant differences in their corporate images. They also represented a wide range of home countries. Screenshots of each company's announcement on Weibo (equivalent to X in the United States) were shown to the participants. The screenshots were comparable in terms of word count, informativeness, and message template. The number of participants that read about Nike, PUMA, UNIQLO, H&M, ZARA, and MLB were, respectively, 143 (21.3%), 118 (17.6%), 102, (15.2%), 95 (14.2%), 104 (15.5%), and 109 (16.2%).

Measurement

All the measurement scales were adopted from previous studies. Specifically, animosity was measured with seven items adopted from Klein and colleagues (1998). Since not all six countries had a war history with China, two war animosity items were removed from the original scale. Ethnocentrism was measured with four items adopted from Cleveland, Laroche, and Papadopoulos (2009). CSR fit was measured with four items adopted from Gilal, Paul, Gilal, and Gilal (2021). CSR motive attribution was measured with two separate constructs—intrinsic and extrinsic motives. Both scales were adopted from Ginder, Kwon, and Byun (2021). Lastly, OPR was measured in dimensions of commitment, satisfaction, trust, and control mutuality. A total of 14 items were adopted from Ki and Hon (2009).

Results

Hypothesis Testing

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and correlation matrix of all major variables in the model. Before hypothesis testing, a factor score was created for each latent variable in the model using SPSS Amos 26. The latent variable factor scores were used in the Hayes Process macro 4.0 for SPSS to

test the hypotheses. Animosity was entered as the independent variable; fit and ethnocentrism were entered as the moderators; intrinsic motive and extrinsic motive were entered as mediators and OPR was entered as the dependent variable. Lastly, gender, age, education, city tier, experience with the company, and perceived donation amount impact were entered as covariates. Model 12 was performed with a bias-corrected bootstrapping of 5,000 samples for the conditional moderated mediation model.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables (N = 671).

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Animosity	2.50	1.59	—				
2. Ethnocentrism	2.58	1.62	.89*	—			
3. CSR fit	5.54	1.09	-.24*	-.23*	—		
4. Intrinsic motive attribution	5.34	0.98	-.50*	-.49*	.45*	—	
5. Extrinsic motive attribution	3.39	1.50	.64*	.67*	-.12*	-.15*	—
6. OPR	5.60	0.97	-.55*	-.52*	.46*	.77*	-.22*

* $p < .01$.

The full model was significant ($R^2 = .78$, $F(15, 653) = 157.69$, $p < .01$). Hypothesis 1 suggested that animosity has a direct negative impact on OPR. Results suggested that the effect was significantly negative ($\beta = -.22$, $SE = 0.04$, $t = -6.11$, $p < .01$). Hence, H1 is supported.

Hypothesis 2 suggested that animosity (a) negatively affects intrinsic motive attribution and (b) positively affects extrinsic motive attribution. Specifically, the negative effect of animosity on intrinsic motive was significant ($\beta = -.20$, $SE = 0.05$, $t = -4.16$, $p < .01$). The positive effect of animosity on extrinsic motive was also significant ($\beta = .25$, $SE = 0.07$, $t = 3.82$, $p < .01$). Results support both H2a and H2b.

Hypothesis 3 suggested that intrinsic motive attribution has a significantly stronger positive impact on OPR than extrinsic motive attribution. First, both intrinsic and extrinsic motive attributions had a positive impact on OPR. Specifically, for intrinsic motive attribution, $\beta = .33$, $SE = 0.03$, $t = 11.53$, $p < .01$. For extrinsic motive attribution, $\beta = .07$, $SE = 0.02$, $t = 3.24$, $p < .01$. To test the equality of the two coefficients, the two coefficients' 95% confidence intervals (CIs) were compared. Based on Cumming (2009), when the overlap of the two CIs is less than 50%, the two coefficients are considered significantly different. The 95% CI of $\beta_{\text{Intrinsic}}$ was [0.28, 0.39], and the 95% confidence interval of $\beta_{\text{Extrinsic}}$ was [0.03, 0.11]. The two CIs had no overlap. Therefore, the positive effect of intrinsic motive attribution on OPR was significantly stronger than the positive effect of extrinsic motive attribution. Therefore, H3 is supported.

Hypothesis 4 suggested the interaction effect between animosity and fit on (a) intrinsic motive and (b) extrinsic motive attributions. The two-way interaction effect on intrinsic motive attribution was significant ($\beta = .26$, $SE = 0.06$, $t = 11.08$, $p < .01$). Specifically, the negative effect of animosity was significantly stronger when fit was low ($\beta = -.40$, $SE = 0.03$, $t = -15.02$, $p < .01$, 95% CI [-0.45, -0.34]) than when fit was medium ($\beta = -.24$, $SE = 0.02$, $t = -10.79$, $p < .01$, 95% CI [-0.29, -0.20]);

and the negative effect was also stronger when fit was medium than when fit was high ($\beta = -.14$, $SE = 0.03$, $t = -4.76$, $p < .01$, 95% CI $[-0.21, -0.09]$; See Figure 2 for the interaction pattern. To note, the moderator condition values corresponded to the 16th, 50th, and 84th percentiles). The two-way interaction effect on extrinsic motive attribution was insignificant ($\beta = .001$, $SE = 0.04$, $t = 0.19$, $p > .05$). Specifically, there was no difference in the effect of animosity on extrinsic motive attribution no matter what the perceived fit was. Therefore, H4a is supported; H4b is not supported.

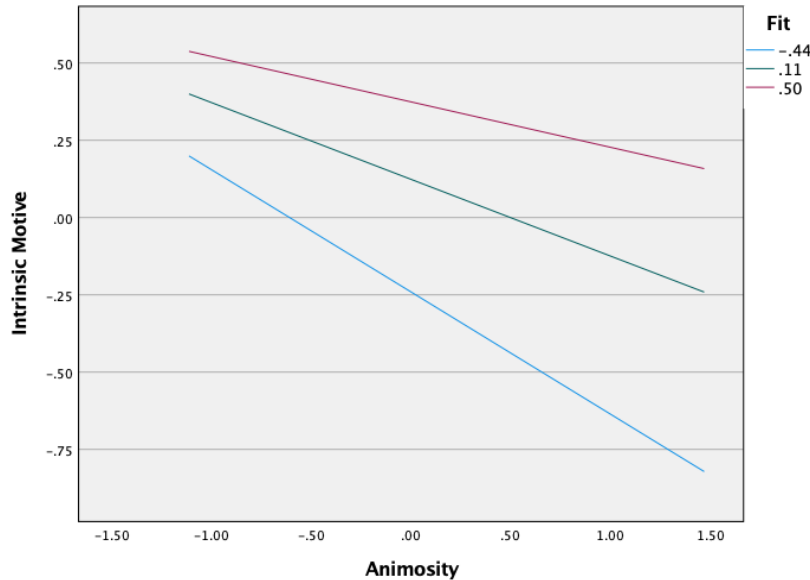


Figure 2. The interaction of animosity and fit on intrinsic motive attribution.

Hypothesis 5 suggested a three-way interaction among animosity, fit, and ethnocentrism on (a) intrinsic motive attribution and (b) extrinsic motive attribution. For intrinsic motive attribution, the three-way interaction was significant ($\beta = -.11$, $SE = 0.02$, $t = -4.77$, $p < .01$, 95% CI $[-0.16, -0.07]$; R^2 change = .02, $F(1, 655) = 22.71$). The interaction coefficient of animosity \times fit was significant when ethnocentrism was low (coefficient = .30, $F(1, 655) = 10.50$, $p < .01$) and medium (coefficient = .23, $F(1, 655) = 6.97$, $p < .01$); the two-way interaction became insignificant when ethnocentrism was high (coefficient = $-.03$, $F(1, 655) = .11$, $p > .05$). When ethnocentrism was high, the effect of animosity on intrinsic motive attribution was significant regardless of the fit level. When ethnocentrism was low, the negative effect of animosity on intrinsic motive was significantly stronger when fit was low ($\beta = -.47$, $SE = 0.06$, $t = -7.41$, $p < .01$, 95% CI $[-0.60, -0.35]$) compared with when fit was high ($\beta = -.19$, $SE = 0.08$, $t = -2.23$, $p < .05$, 95% CI $[-0.35, -0.02]$) because there was less than 50% overlap between the two CIs. Similarly, when ethnocentrism was medium, the negative effect of animosity on intrinsic motive attribution was significantly stronger when fit was low ($\beta = -.37$, $SE = 0.06$, $t = -6.32$, $p < .01$, 95% CI $[-0.48, -0.25]$) compared with when fit was high ($\beta = -.16$, $SE = 0.08$, $t = -2.06$, $p < .05$, 95% CI $[-0.30, -0.01]$); Figure 3).

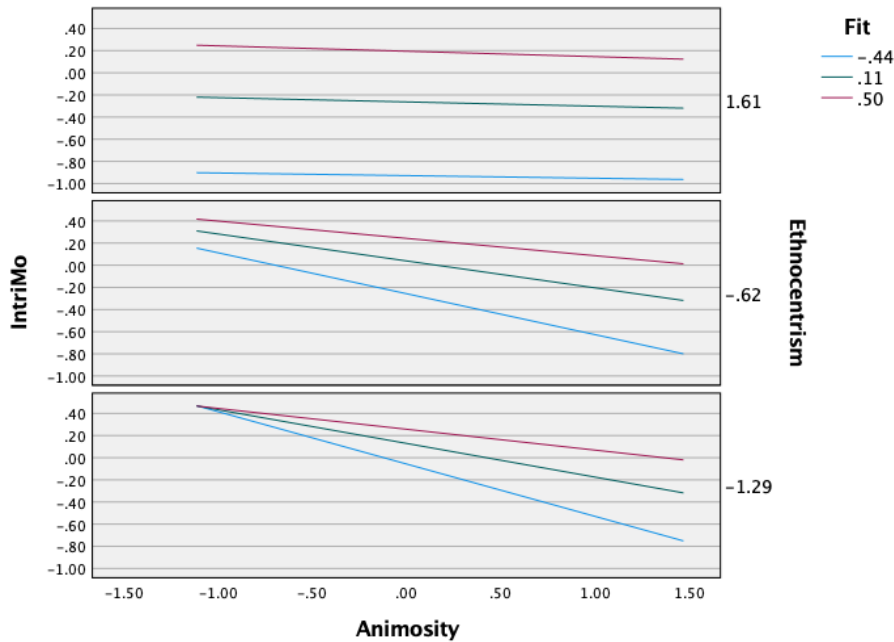


Figure 3. The three-way interaction of animosity, fit, and ethnocentrism on intrinsic motive attribution.

For extrinsic motive attribution too, the three-way interaction was significant ($\beta = .10$, $SE = 0.03$, $t = 3.19$, $p < .01$, 95% CI [0.04, 0.17]; R^2 change = .01, $F(1, 655) = 10.19$). When ethnocentrism was low or medium, the animosity \times fit interaction coefficients were significant (for low ethnocentrism, coefficient = $-.43$, $F(1, 655) = 11.39$, $p < .01$; for medium ethnocentrism, coefficient = $-.36$, $F(1, 655) = 9.46$, $p < .01$). When ethnocentrism was high, the animosity \times fit interaction coefficients became insignificant (coefficient = $-.13$, $F(1, 655) = 1.35$, $p > .05$). The specific pattern was slightly different. When fit was low, the effect of animosity on extrinsic motive attribution was significant regardless of the ethnocentrism level. When fit was medium, the positive effect of animosity on extrinsic motive was significant when ethnocentrism was high ($\beta = .32$, $SE = 0.06$, $t = 5.36$, $p < .01$) and medium ($\beta = .18$, $SE = 0.08$, $t = 2.35$, $p < .05$) and insignificant when ethnocentrism was low ($\beta = .14$, $SE = 0.09$, $t = 1.62$, $p > .05$). When fit was high, the positive effect of animosity on extrinsic motive attribution was only significant when ethnocentrism was also high ($\beta = .27$, $SE = 0.08$, $t = 3.39$, $p < .01$) and insignificant when ethnocentrism was medium ($\beta = .04$, $SE = 0.10$, $t = 0.43$, $p > .05$) and low ($\beta = -.02$, $SE = 0.11$, $t = -0.21$, $p > .05$; Figure 4). Therefore, H5 is supported.

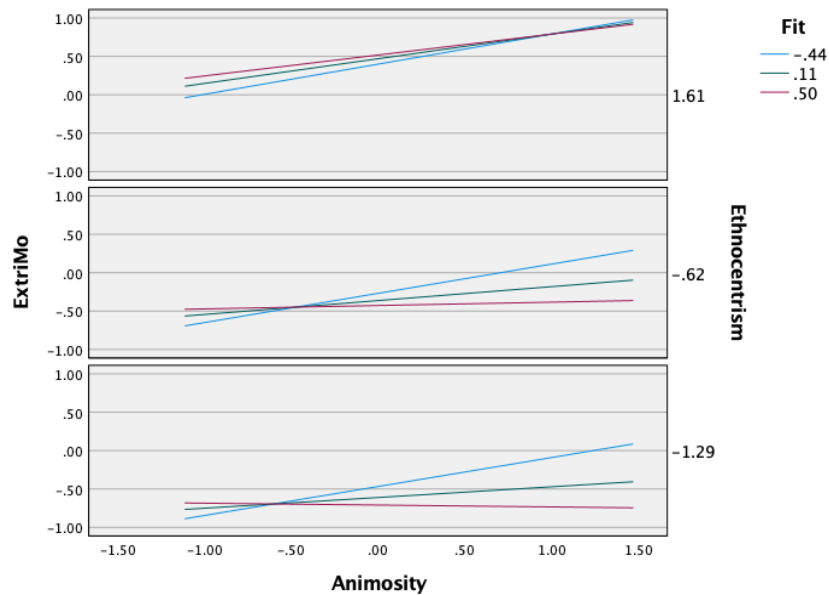


Figure 4. The three-way interaction of animosity, fit, and ethnocentrism on extrinsic motive attribution.

The last hypothesis, H6, stated the conditional moderated mediation effect of animosity on OPR. Hayes Model 12 results suggested that the direct negative effect of animosity on OPR would be insignificant when ethnocentrism was low regardless of fit levels ($p > .05$). And the direct negative effect would become significant when ethnocentrism was high regardless of fit levels ($p < .01$).

Regarding indirect effect via the mediation of intrinsic motive attribution (H6a), the conditionally moderated mediation was insignificant overall (index = $-.04$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI $[-0.07, 0.01]$). Specifically, the negative indirect effect of animosity on OPR via the mediation of intrinsic motivation was significant when ethnocentrism was low, regardless of CSR fit levels. When ethnocentrism was high, the mediated indirect effect of animosity was insignificant regardless of fit levels. Therefore, H6a is partially supported, in that the indirect effect of animosity on OPR via intrinsic motivation was significant under the conditions of low ethnocentrism and all levels of CSR fit.

On the other hand, the moderated moderation via the mediation of extrinsic motive attribution was significant (index = $.01$, $SE = 0.01$, 95% CI $[0.001, 0.02]$). Conditional moderated mediation by ethnocentrism levels suggested that the interactive effect of animosity and CSR fit on OPR via the mediation of extrinsic CSR motive attribution was significant when ethnocentrism was low (index = $-.03$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI $[-0.07, -0.001]$), and insignificant when ethnocentrism was high. Specifically, the indirect effect of animosity on OPR via the mediation of extrinsic CSR motive attributions was significant when ethnocentrism was high, regardless of fit levels. When ethnocentrism was low, the extrinsic motive-mediated indirect effect was significant when fit was low and insignificant when fit was high. Therefore, H6b is supported.

Simply put, intrinsic and extrinsic motives parallelly and respectively mediate the effects of animosity on OPR in different scenarios. The total effect model suggested that animosity has a total negative effect on OPR via the two mediators under various conditions ($\beta = -.38$, $SE = 0.02$, $t = -16.84$, $p < .01$, 95% CI [-0.42, -0.34]).

Discussion

The Application of COO in OPR

The direct influence of animosity on stakeholders' evaluations of their relationships with the MNEs justified the application of the COO effect in public relations research. As Cheng (2018) reviewed in her COPR proposition, public relations is about attempting to maintain long-term, high-quality relationships with publics amid a dynamic environment where the stances of both parties constantly change. The relationship between an organization and its publics does not solely depend on the two parties but also on various contingency factors cast by all parties involved in the relationship. The goal of public relations is to monitor and resolve the contingency factors that may cause conflicts between the organization and its publics. This extension of COO and animosity effect to public relations research supported the COPR perspective by establishing an association between animosity and OPR. As a country-specific construct, animosity may fluctuate depending on diplomatic and economic conflicts, war histories, division of cultures/values/norms, individual political attitude changes, and so on. And as an extrinsic attribute of MNE, animosity can influence OPR, independent of corporate communication and relationship-management strategies. Meanwhile, ethnocentrism, as an individual trait, also functions as a predisposing contingent factor in the COPR framework. Thus, this study contributes to the dynamism and sophistication of OPR research, especially considering the COPR concept.

Antecedents and Consequences of CSR Motives

This study revealed that animosity affects stakeholders' judgments about MNEs' CSR program qualities, specifically the attributions of CSR motives. Supporting the group-based attribution bias, MNEs' nationalities are read as social group identity labels by the host country stakeholders (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). As out-group members, host country stakeholders' antipathy toward their COO can easily bias the perceptions about MNEs' CSR motives. Stakeholders are less willing to believe that a company from a "hostile" country can be sincere and authentic with its CSR activities. This finding extends the contextual applicability of attribution bias.

Nonetheless, regardless of which types of motives are attributed, host country stakeholders are willing to give MNEs social credits and offer relational rewards to MNEs for their CSR activities as both intrinsic and extrinsic CSR motive attributions positively contribute to OPR. This study reconciled the conflicting evidence as to how intrinsic and extrinsic CSR motives affect stakeholder attitudes and behavioral outcomes (Forehand & Grier, 2003; Kim & Lee, 2012). First, the positive influence of intrinsic CSR attributions is significantly stronger than that of extrinsic attributions, which is consistent with previous findings that intrinsic CSR motives are much more preferred than extrinsic CSR motives (Wut & Ng, 2022). Yet, stakeholders do not necessarily "punish" MNEs for being extrinsically motivated. In this case, stakeholders are likely to take a utilitarian perspective when evaluating the value of CSR motives (Kim & Lee, 2012). Extrinsically motivated CSR programs have the same utility as intrinsically motivated CSR

programs and could provide similar social benefits to the host country's society. Therefore, both intrinsic and extrinsic motive attributions positively affect OPR, with the caveat that intrinsically motivated CSR has a much stronger positive effect on OPR than extrinsically motivated CSR programs.

The Moderating Effects of Fit and Ethnocentrism

This study identified two moderators for the effect of animosity. First, a two-way interaction effect between animosity and fit on intrinsic motivation was found. The pattern of the interaction was consistent with that in previous studies using the contexts of noncontroversial companies (e.g., Chen, Hong, & Occa, 2019; Gilal et al., 2020), that for MNEs dealing with high animosity, high-fit CSR programs will lead to stronger intrinsic CSR motive attributions than low-fit CSR programs; whereas for MNEs dealing with low animosity, high- and low-fit CSR programs make no difference regarding motive. Previous studies suggest that when there is a need to disassociate CSR programs from a company's products, services, target audiences, or corporate images, a low-fit CSR program will yield better outcomes than a high-fit program (Austin & Gaither, 2019; Kim & Ferguson, 2019). The current study adopted the context of the sports and fashion apparel industry (e.g., Nike and ZARA). Unlike other more well-recognized controversial industries such as alcohol and cigarettes (Lindorff, Prior Jonson, & McGuire, 2012), the entire sports and fashion apparel industry is not yet widely associated with stigma and controversy among the Chinese consumer base (Koty, 2022). In this case, as a peripheral cue for evaluating CSR programs, COO does not elicit the need for disassociating CSR fit from its core business.

In addition, the three-way interaction suggests that when ethnocentrism is high, fit does not moderate the effect of animosity on intrinsic motive attribution. However, for less ethnocentric individuals, low CSR fit intensifies the negative effect of animosity on intrinsic motive attributions. Thus, CSR fit as a moderator only functions for individual stakeholders who are not highly ethnocentric. And for the less ethnocentric stakeholders, low animosity is always associated with high intrinsic motive, regardless of CSR fit levels. Only when animosity level is high will high CSR fit programs lead to high intrinsic CSR attributions.

Regarding extrinsic motive attributions, no two-way interaction was found between animosity and fit. However, the three-way interaction provided additional insights. Like the three-way interaction on intrinsic motive attribution, high ethnocentrism creates a ceiling effect for animosity. As Klein and colleagues (1998) clarified, ethnocentrism is a dispositional trait that applies generally to all foreign products and companies, whereas animosity is based on country-specific judgment. Therefore, high ethnocentrism intensifies the effect of animosity, masking the effect of CSR fit. Like intrinsic attributions, CSR fit does matter for the less ethnocentric individuals when attributing extrinsic CSR motives. Therefore, when ethnocentrism is low, low CSR fit will accentuate the negative effect of animosity. When CSR fit is high, animosity no longer contributes to extrinsic CSR motive attributions. In other words, for highly ethnocentric individuals, CSR fit does not matter; only animosity positively affects extrinsic motive attributions. When the less ethnocentric individuals evaluate the motives of MNEs with high animosity, high-fit CSR programs lead to lower extrinsic motive attribution than low-fit CSR programs; when the less ethnocentric individuals evaluate the motives of MNEs with low animosity, there is no difference in extrinsic motive attributions between high- and low-fit CSR programs.

Generally, the findings reinforced the importance of the CSR fit strategy by identifying another contingency factor in the CSR communication process moderated by CSR fit. This study also revealed the limitation of CSR fit as a moderator for the highly ethnocentric stakeholders.

Meanwhile, as Farah and Mehdi (2021) contended, the majority of the existing research on consumer animosity and ethnocentrism has focused on the tangible products sector. Filling this gap, the current study extends the applicability of the two constructs to examining MNEs' intangible asset, that is, OPR. Moreover, different from the extensive literature, which focused on the sequential causal effects between animosity and ethnocentrism, this study examined the interaction between animosity and ethnocentrism, presenting a unique dynamism between the two constructs. The current study positioned consumer animosity as the primary independent variable, ensuring that various levels of consumer animosity were represented. Meanwhile, ethnocentrism was chosen as the moderating variable due to its dispositional nature and stability across various contexts. In all, this study contributed to the research on consumer animosity and ethnocentrism by revealing a different relational dynamism between the two constructs and investigating their influence on companies' intangible assets in addition to product sales.

The Parallel Mediation of Two CSR Motive Attributions

The full conditional moderated mediation model revealed that the intrinsic and extrinsic CSR motive attributions mediate the effect of animosity on OPR under different conditions of CSR fit and ethnocentrism. On the one hand, for the highly ethnocentric stakeholders, animosity exerts a strong direct negative effect on OPR regardless of CSR fit levels. The positive indirect effect is also significant and mediated only by extrinsic CSR motive attributions at all levels of CSR fit. On the other hand, for the less ethnocentric stakeholders, animosity does not have a direct negative effect on OPR. Instead, the influence is exerted indirectly by both reducing intrinsic CSR motive attributions at all levels of CSR fit and increasing extrinsic CSR motive attributions only when CSR fit is low.

Overall, as a venue for obtaining social legitimacy, the effect of CSR communication for MNEs is more prominent among the less ethnocentric stakeholders. The highly ethnocentric stakeholders do not necessarily go through the cognitive process of attributing intrinsic CSR motives. Although extrinsic CSR motive attributions play a mediating role for highly ethnocentric individuals, the positive effects of extrinsic CSR motive attribution on OPR are limited in strength. Highly ethnocentric stakeholders are inclined to generalize about their relationships with the MNEs based primarily on the companies' COO. Contrarily, the process of CSR communication carries more weight for the less ethnocentric stakeholders since intrinsic and extrinsic motive attributions both mediate the effect of animosity on OPR. The results revealed distinct mediation paths among stakeholders with different levels of ethnocentrism, which contributes to the understanding of the nuanced CSR communication mechanisms.

Practical Implications

The results of this study offer important managerial insights for MNEs that operate in overseas markets where their COO is generally considered offensive or aversive. First and foremost, MNEs should be aware of adverse effects that their COO could potentially cast on their relationship-building efforts in host

countries, especially when political, economic, historical, military, or religious conflicts exist between the two countries. In this case, practitioners should downplay the “made-in” cues associated with their products and brands to avoid the negative influence of animosity. Second, if MNEs attempt to gain social legitimacy through CSR programs in host countries, managers should generally avoid low-fit CSR programs especially when the host country stakeholders’ animosity toward their COO is heightened. Third, it is very important for MNE managers to be knowledgeable about the specific psychographic trait of ethnocentrism in the target host country and strategically use stakeholder segmentation strategy while communicating CSR programs. Whenever possible, they should target CSR programs among the segment of stakeholders who are less ethnocentric and refrain from using CSR programs among the stakeholder segments with a psychographic profile of high ethnocentrism. Fourth, given that animosity hampers the effectiveness of CSR communications by reducing intrinsic CSR motive attributions, practitioners should adopt other established CSR communication strategies to enforce stakeholders’ perceptions of intrinsic CSR motives, such as transparent communication, social impact-driven messages and stakeholder-involvement strategies, and embedding CSR in corporate values, to offset the effects of animosity.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite the theoretical and practical significance of the study, it has several limitations, which future research should address. First, the study adopted the context of Chinese stakeholders’ responses toward MNEs in the apparel industry from the United States, Japan, Germany, South Korea, Switzerland, and Spain. According to COO literature, citizens of China are particularly prone to the effect of animosity. To further improve the external validity of the study, future studies should test the effect of animosity in CSR communication and organization–public relationship building in other national contexts. Second, the current study approached consumer animosity as a holistic concept. Future research could examine the sub-dimensions of animosity, such as military animosity versus economic animosity or stable animosity versus situational animosity for their effects on CSR programs with various focuses. Third, the current conceptual model highlighted the concepts that are unfavorable to MNEs in the COO literature. Conversely, future studies could explore the impacts of other COO-related constructs, such as affinity and country images, as well as individual traits like cosmopolitanism, to understand how MNEs can effectively leverage these positively valenced concepts for communication with international stakeholders. Finally, the current study concentrated on MNEs as the originators of CSR messages. Subsequent research could investigate the mechanisms of COO effects for domestic companies in comparison with the findings for MNEs.

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Appendix



Figure A1. Sample Weibo screenshot (Zara, 2021).

Translation of the Weibo Text

INDITEX, the parent company of ZARA, is paying close attention to the damage done by the severe rainfall and the great loss that Henan is suffering from. The disasters have affected everyone's heart.

For rescuing Henan, our company decides to donate 1 million RMB in cash, in addition to 9.36 million RMB worth of hygiene products (3.55 million in quantity) to help with the local flood prevention and relief operations!

Come on, Henan! Let us stand together through thick and thin!