

Why Corporate Social Responsibility Affects the Employee:

Investigating Underlying Psychological Mechanisms

by

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## Summary

In organizations and in research, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has gained more and more attention, reflecting global societal developments. Employees' reactions to CSR are especially relevant, because they witness, design, and participate in CSR and CSR shapes the image employees have of an organization. Up to now, there is a large body of research on the relationships between CSR perceptions and commitment, job satisfaction, and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). As most studies are correlational, there is not sufficient information about the causality of effects which is relevant to be able to exclude alternative influencing factors. Social identity theory is the prevailing theoretical approach to build hypotheses on, followed by research on justice and meaningfulness as explaining mechanisms of why and how CSR affects employees. It is important to clarify if employees react to CSR because they identify with their organization, because they assume they will be treated fairly by their organization, or because CSR makes their work more meaningful, or if it is a combination of the afore-mentioned. A comparison of psychological mechanisms will show which explaining mechanism is the strongest and therefore should be assigned a central role in future theory developments.

This work contributes to the literature by quantitatively synthesizing research findings on the relationship between CSR and employee-related attitudes and behavior. More specifically, I examine its causality and scrutinize the above mentioned major theoretical approaches: identification, justice, and meaningfulness. Based on the results, I recommend how organizations can design their communication of CSR to their employees based on the best working mechanism and identify open research fields. To achieve these goals, three studies were conducted.

To investigate if CSR is similarly or differently related to specific outcomes such as commitment and job satisfaction and to compare different CSR initiatives based on their focus (people, planet, or profit), we quantitatively synthesized the state of research. Study 1, a meta-

analysis on the relationship between CSR and employee-related attitudes and behavior ( $N = 89,396$ ,  $k = 132$ ), revealed significant relationships between CSR and attitudes and behavior and differences with regard to the focus of CSR. Relationships were stronger for attitudes than for behavior. Identification mediated the relationships between CSR and commitment, but not the relationship between CSR and job satisfaction as well as OCB. We identified that experimental studies were severely underrepresented, which lead to Study 2.

In Study 2, we examined identification as explaining mechanism to learn whether social identity theory is applicable to CSR research, which is the most often used theory in psychological CSR research. This is important, because identification often was investigated as a mediator, but the underlying theoretical assumptions on how CSR may arise identification have not been sufficiently verified. In doing so, we examined the causality of the relation of CSR and commitment, job satisfaction, and OCB by using an experimental vignette methodology ( $N = 136$  employees). Results showed that there is a causal effect of CSR on commitment and job satisfaction. Identification mediated the effect of CSR on commitment, job satisfaction, and OCB, but CSR explained only little variance in identification. This indicated that identification explains the effect of CSR on employees, but there may be better explaining mechanisms.

In Study 3, which is methodologically similar to Study 2, we investigated three explaining mechanisms of the effect of CSR on commitment, job satisfaction, and OCB, and tested them in parallel to compare them: identification, justice, and meaningfulness. Results revealed, contrary to the status of identification in CSR research, justice as the strongest explaining mechanism ( $N = 189$  employees). A successful exact replication of our research findings ( $N = 131$  employees) increased the reliability of our results.

To find a common conclusion of the three experimental studies, I synthesized the findings from the experimental studies (Studies 2 and 3,  $k = 3$ ,  $N = 456$ ). The results of the meta-analytical structural equation mediation model showed that identification mediated the

effect of CSR on commitment, but not job satisfaction and OCB. Justice mediated all effects of CSR on dependent variables. Meaningfulness mediated the effects of CSR on commitment and job satisfaction, but not OCB. The estimates of the indirect effect were largest for justice.

All studies taken together, I give an overview of the state of research in CSR, revealing the sizes of the relations of different aspects of CSR and employees' attitudes and behavior. I showed that the effect of CSR on commitment and job satisfaction is causal, which is important for organizational initiatives on CSR directed at employees to be effective. I conclude that social identity theory should no longer be assigned a central role in CSR theory, and promote justice to be at the core of future theoretical integrations and developments. I discuss what makes justice different from the other psychological mechanisms and why justice may be more relevant to CSR than identification and meaningfulness. Finally, I give practical recommendations for communicating CSR to employees based on our knowledge of the importance of justice for CSR and identify open research fields.

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## Introduction

Social topics such as corporate social responsibility (CSR) are not just a modern temporal trend. Mankind has always attempted to describe human nature and to define what characterizes us as humans. Many debate if mankind is good or evil (Fromm, 1964; Nietzsche, 1909), or if we behave more egoistically or more altruistically (Hoffman, 1981; Smith, 1822). These fundamental questions are reflected in the efforts to describe the human as *homo oeconomicus*, *homo reciprocans*, *social man*, *complex man*, among others (Kirchler et al., 2004), mirroring economic developments and new business practices. Until 1930, the focus was on economic efficiency as reflected in *homo oeconomicus* (Kirchler et al., 2004), but later, researchers made the discovery that people behave in an uneconomic way. When resources are allocated, individuals waive their own profit to punish unfair behavior of others (Fehr & Gächter, 2002). Through this discovery, *homo reciprocans* emerged, describing humans as cooperative even when they will not benefit (Bowles & Gintis, 2002; Dohmen et al., 2009).

This shift from a mere profit orientation to a social orientation is also observable in recent economic trends. Following the rationale of *homo oeconomicus* as a human image, companies would focus solely on their profit. In fact, companies became social actors, and aim to neutralize their impact on the natural environment and society: They want to give something back to the society and the natural environment by means of corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs and strategies (Latapí Agudelo et al., 2019). The United Nations defined a set of 17 goals to achieve by 2030 in their Sustainable Development Agenda (UN General Assembly, 2015). By means of CSR, companies can contribute to several of these goals, such as sustainable production, good health and well-being, education, gender equality, ending poverty, clean water and clean energy, just to name a few. By means of CSR, organizations contribute to a sustainable development beyond legal requirements.

This work does not aim to discuss human images; rather, these observations and labels help to put economic developments that may be regarded as a temporary fashionable trend, such as CSR, into a broader perspective. The connection of CSR to central aspects of the social human nature indicates that CSR will not remain a temporary trend. I propose to recognize CSR as a reflection of global human development (Blowfield, 2004, 2005) and therefore regard it as a central topic in industrial and organizational psychology.

CSR research deals with several stakeholder perspectives, such as the direct beneficiaries of CSR, customers, applicants, or employees (El Akremi et al., 2018). From an organizational psychological point of view, employees are the most important stakeholder group, as they plan, design, participate in, benefit from, or react to their organization's CSR initiatives (Gond et al., 2017). It is assumed that CSR impacts employees positively based on numerous studies reporting a positive relationship of CSR initiatives and employees' job satisfaction, commitment, or organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB) (Rupp & Mallory, 2015). What we do not know is whether this relationship is causal. Only the knowledge about causality will assure that CSR in fact has an impact on employees. When a relation is causal, other influencing factors can be excluded. Transferred to CSR this would mean that employees are satisfied, committed and show citizenship behavior due to CSR and not because they have an interesting job (Sousa-Poza & Sousa-Poza, 2000), they feel supported by their organization (Meyer et al., 2002), or they are conscientious (Organ & Ryan, 1995), which are typical predictors of job satisfaction, commitment, and OCB. In addition, knowledge about causality can clarify whether CSR affects attitudes and behavior such as job satisfaction, commitment, and OCB, and exclude that employees perceive more CSR because they are satisfied or committed to their organization. Organizations might be interested in intentionally changing their employees' perceptions of CSR, but to be sure that CSR increases attitudes and affects behavior, research confirming causality is required.



Moreover, CSR research is still regarded as undertheorized (Wang et al., 2020), and the psychological mechanisms explaining how CSR might affect employees remain unclear. The most common theoretical explanations are based on social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), organizational justice (Rupp, 2011), and the meaningfulness approach (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019; Seivwright & Unsworth, 2016). A review showed that most studies build hypotheses based on social identity theory (Gond et al., 2017), but the underlying theoretical assumptions on how CSR may arise identification have not been sufficiently verified. Research investigating and comparing more than one explaining mechanism is scarce and we do not know which explaining mechanism is the strongest. Therefore, psychological mechanisms have to be scrutinized and compared to broaden our knowledge in CSR research (Wang et al., 2020). Most studies focus on a single psychological mechanism, although there are attempts to compare or integrate the theoretical approaches (e.g., De Roeck et al., 2014).

The overarching goal of this work is to gain knowledge about how and why employees react to CSR. This work contributes to the CSR literature by synthesizing research findings meta-analytically to learn about the size of the relationships between CSR and employee-related attitudes and behavior and to investigate which CSR initiatives are related most strongly to employee-related attitudes and behavior, for example by comparing employees' reactions to initiatives focusing the society with initiatives focusing the natural environment. The quantification of relationships is the advantage of a meta-analysis over a narrative review. In the next step, I uncover the nature of the relationship of CSR and employee-related outcomes to gain knowledge about causality. Finally, I investigate the three most important psychological mechanisms —identification, justice, and meaningfulness— and compare them to determine if they provide equally strong explanations or if there is one prevailing mechanism to explain the effect of CSR on employees. Thereby I promote theory in CSR research and provide a theoretical basis for more complex future theoretical models. Based on the findings of three studies, I clarify and advance theory in CSR research, guide future

research based on the identified open research fields, and derive practical recommendations for organizations designing CSR in a way that benefits employees with a focus on organization-internal issues.

### **Theoretical Background**

CSR is companies' and organizations' "caring for the well-being of others and the environment with the purpose of also creating value for the business. CSR is manifested in the strategies and operating practices that an organization develops in operationalizing its relationships with and impacts on the well-being of all its key stakeholders and the natural environment" (Glavas & Kelley, 2014, p. 171). An individual-level investigation of the effects and experiences of CSR on individuals such as employees is micro-CSR (Rupp & Mallory, 2015). CSR can range from simply "avoiding bad" to best practice CSR strategies characterized by "doing good", while "doing good" is assumed to be more effective than "avoiding bad" (Lin-Hi & Müller, 2013). Opposite to CSR is considered corporate social irresponsibility (CSiR; Jones et al., 2009), which describes "corporate actions that result in (potential) disadvantages and/or harm to other actors" (Lin-Hi & Müller, 2013, p. 1932).

CSR is classified as external or internal, which designates if CSR is directed towards stakeholders outside of the organization such as customers, or if it is directed inwards, such as towards the employees. Another classification is the triple bottom line of sustainability, which differentiates people, planet and profit (Elkington, 1994), describing the content or direction of CSR initiatives towards the society, the natural environment, with remaining profitable at the same time. People can be both internal and external, as it can focus on employees as internal stakeholders or customers as external stakeholders. Planet means an orientation on the natural environment and is external; profit includes creating value for the business and is internal. The most narrowly-structured taxonomy is the stakeholder approach differentiating CSR directed at shareholders, customers, employees, society, supplier, and the natural

environment, or the government (El Akremi et al., 2018; Türker, 2009). This work focuses on employees as a stakeholder group perceiving their organization's CSR activities and strategies. In this role, employees experience not only CSR directed towards them, but also the CSR strategy as a whole, and they perceive CSR directed towards all other stakeholders (El Akremi et al., 2018; Türker, 2009). However, not all CSR initiatives will affect employees in the same way because they are more or less personally involved or attach importance to different aspects of CSR (Im et al., 2017; van Dick et al., 2019). The debate if employees react more strongly to internal CSR due to self-interest or to external CSR due to moral concerns associated with benefits for the society and/or their organization is still on-going (Farooq et al., 2017; Zhao et al., 2020).

### **How and Why CSR Affects Employees**

There is much research on the relationship of the perception of CSR by employees and employee attitudes and behavior (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Glavas, 2016b; Jones & Rupp, 2017; Rupp & Mallory, 2015). For example, researchers found CSR perceptions to be linked to increased organizational commitment, job satisfaction, work engagement, and organizational attractiveness (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). Concerning behavior, CSR perceptions are linked to increased OCB and reduced turnover. Even though these relationships have been investigated and reported in different reviews on this topic numerous times (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Glavas, 2016b; Jones & Rupp, 2017; Rupp & Mallory, 2015), still some questions are left unanswered. First, some studies report widely varying relationships in magnitude (Raub & Blunschi, 2014; Zhang et al., 2014), and a quantification of effect sizes using meta-analytic methods would bring clarity and complete insights from existing narrative reviews. Second, knowing which type of CSR appears most appealing to employees would help organizations to improve their internal communication of CSR. Therefore, a quantifiable comparison of the relations of different types of CSR with employee attitudes and behavior is important. A very recent meta-analysis on CSR reports large effect

sizes of the relation of CSR and job satisfaction, commitment, turnover intentions, and OCB ( $k = 86$ ,  $N = 50,607$ ; Zhao et al., 2020). However, the literature research was terminated in April 2018, therefore the most recent research is not included, and only one moderator is investigated by comparing internal to external CSR. It still is interesting to learn if CSR affects attitudes and behavior differently, which content of CSR is most appealing to employees such as CSR focusing on the environment (planet) or the society in general (people), and to learn if employees react differently to CSR based on their age, gender, or culture of the country of residence to learn if employees' reactions to CSR are universal. Third, we have to extend our knowledge on the correlation or causal relationship of CSR and employee-related outcomes by comparing experimental, longitudinal and correlational studies. Last but not least, we do not know how and why CSR is positively related to employee-related outcomes. Up to now, research focused on a single or, more rarely, two psychological mechanisms. A comparison of psychological mechanisms will reveal whether there is one strong mechanisms or whether they are equal in explaining the effect of CSR on employees. We focus on the three most prominent psychological mechanisms: identification, justice, and meaningfulness.

### ***Identification***

Social identity theory originally stems from social psychological research and described the process that leads to the formation of groups and to the development of a feeling of belongingness among group members (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1985). Individuals categorize themselves and others into groups based on social attributes, such as gender, age, or profession (Tajfel & Turner, 1985; Trepte & Loy, 2017). Belonging to a group associated with favorable social attributes enhances self-esteem (Hogg & Turner, 1985). Later, Ashforth and Mael (1989) transferred social identity theory to the organizational context and theorized how employees develop an organizational identity in their workplace. Ashforth and Mael (1989) described three factors enhancing the formation of an organizational identity:

distinctiveness, prestige and salience of the out-group. *Distinctiveness* describes the uniqueness of a group and differentiates one group from another (Oakes & Turner, 1986). *Prestige* is related to the desire to identify oneself cognitively with winners (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), which enhances self-esteem. *Salience* describes how easily people become aware of a group category or group membership (Fitzsimmons, 2013). This awareness of other groups (salience of the out-group) increases the awareness of the in-group (Allen et al., 1983; Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

Social identity theory in the organization is used to explain the impact of CSR on employees (Gond et al., 2017). When employees perceive the distinctiveness and prestige of their organization's CSR initiatives, their organizational identification increases. Their organization is seen as their in-group, but for identification to increase, they also must be aware of other organizations' CSR and a salient out-group. Working for a socially responsible organization is a favorable social attribute (Collier & Esteban, 2007), and people strive for ethical organizations as employers because positively valued group memberships enhance self-esteem (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Brammer et al., 2007; Türker, 2009).

The majority of studies in CSR research ground hypotheses on social identity theory in the organization and assume identification as the underlying psychological mechanism. For example, identification was found to mediate the relationships between CSR and commitment, job satisfaction, engagement, and OCB (Bowles & Gintis, 2002; Farooq et al., 2014; Shin et al., 2016; van Dick et al., 2019). Some researchers tested single aspects of social identity theory as mediators in the context of CSR, such as prestige (De Roeck & Delobbe, 2012; Farooq et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2010). For example, De Roeck et al. (2016) and Wang et al. (2019) investigated prestige as a mediator of the relation of CSR and identification. However, distinctiveness, prestige and salience of the out-group have not yet been investigated simultaneously. Only incorporating all three aspects allows us to rigorously

examine how far social identity theory in organizations explains the effect of CSR on employees.

### ***Justice***

Another, yet less prominent stream of research grounded hypotheses on organizational justice. Organizational justice describes how employees perceive fairness in their employment relationship (De Roeck et al., 2014; Folger & Cropanzano, 1998). Justice perceptions are powerful and guide attitudes and behavior in everyday life and in the workplace (Colquitt et al., 2013; Rupp et al., 2014; Streicher et al., 2008). In the workplace, employees evaluate if they are being treated unfairly or fairly and form overall or multifoci justice perceptions (“looking in”); they can perceive a justice climate based on how their work group is treated (“looking around”); and they can perceive how others are treated by their organization in terms of third-party justice observations (“looking out”; (Rupp, 2011). CSR is regarded as a third-party justice observation: By perceiving CSR, employees observe whether and how the beneficiaries of CSR are treated fairly and evaluate actions taken on behalf of the organization. From observing others being treated fairly, employees conclude that they as well will be treated fairly in the organization (Rupp, 2011). In the specific case when CSR is directed towards employees in terms of internal CSR, employees evaluate how they are treated themselves (“looking in”). Justice has been investigated as a mediator of the relationships between CSR and commitment, job satisfaction, and OCB (Asif et al., 2017; Tziner et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2019), yet experimental research allowing for causal inference is lacking.

### ***Meaningfulness***

The most recent theoretical approach addresses the desire for meaningfulness and purpose in life (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019). Individuals strive to find meaning in their personal, but also in their work life (Rosso et al., 2010). In the work context, meaningfulness is defined as the significance employees attach to their work (Rosso et al., 2010). Meaningfulness,

which can be achieved when employees regard their job as significant by having a positive impact on other people through their work, is regarded as an important job characteristic and is related to job satisfaction (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). Through their organization's engagement in CSR, employees perceive their work as meaningful because they indirectly contribute to common welfare. Sometimes, CSR is even seen as an opportunity to reach meaningfulness that is otherwise lacking in a job (Seivwright & Unsworth, 2016).

Meaningfulness through CSR may be an appealing and motivating factor beyond pay and promotion, that the management should focus on (Glavas, 2016a). With research on meaningfulness through CSR, we can expand our knowledge on what is important to employees in their workplace. Meaningfulness was found to mediate the relationship between CSR and commitment, job satisfaction, and OCB (Kim et al., 2018; Raub & Blunschi, 2014; Supanti & Butcher, 2019), but again experimental research is needed.

### ***Theoretical Integration of Psychological Mechanisms***

All psychological mechanisms are derived from pertinent theoretical approaches, but researchers already have attempted to combine theoretical approaches in micro-CSR. For example, De Roeck et al. (2014) investigated a sequential mediation, with CSR as the independent variable, associated with justice, which was associated with identification and subsequent job satisfaction. Justice was also investigated as a moderator of the relationship between CSR and identification (De Roeck et al., 2016; Ghosh, 2018), and meaningfulness as a moderator of the relationship between CSR and OCB (Ong et al., 2018). Although justice and meaningfulness were investigated as a moderator in some studies, more often they were investigated as mediators. In their meta-analysis, Zhao et al. (2020) tested a theoretical model originally proposed by De Roeck and Maon (2018) and compared a parallel and sequential mediation model for explaining the relation of CSR and employee-related outcomes through identification, trust, and justice. The parallel mediation model yielded identification as the strongest explaining mechanism, but the sequential model (CSR – justice – trust –

identification – outcomes) fitted the data better (the number of studies included in this analysis is unknown). Because there is still no consensus about how these psychological mechanisms work together, and hypotheses on more than one psychological mechanism become more and more complex, it is important to test identification, justice and meaningfulness in parallel to learn which psychological mechanism is the strongest and therefore should be assigned a central role in future theory development. While identification and justice can be linked through trust (De Roeck & Maon, 2018; Zhao et al., 2020), identification and justice stem from pertinent theoretical approaches, which also applies to the meaningfulness approach. I decided to compare explaining mechanisms stemming from pertinent theoretical approaches to learn which one is the strongest, thereby delivering a solid frame for future theory development.

### **Outline**

The aim of this work is to gain knowledge about the psychological mechanisms leading to employees' reactions to CSR. In three studies, I address the following shortages of previous research: First, there are numerous qualitative reviews on micro-CSR (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019; Glavas, 2016b; Gond et al., 2017; Rupp & Mallory, 2015), and a recent research synthesis does not answer all questions (Zhao et al., 2020). In a meta-analysis, I aim to complement narrative reviews by structuring what is already known by a comparison of, for example, correlational to experimental studies and determining effect sizes for relationships between CSR and employees' attitudes and behavior (Study 1). Narrative reviews, compared to meta-analyses, are more prone to subjectivity and do not provide quantified effect sizes. Second, due to the large number of correlational studies, it is often assumed that the relationship between CSR and employee-related attitudes and behavior is causal. I therefore used an experimental method to investigate causality (Studies 2 and 3) to exclude that the effect is not caused by other influencing factors than CSR. Third, CSR research is



undertheorized (Wang et al., 2020), several theoretical approaches exist in parallel, or there are first attempts to integrate theoretical approaches (De Roeck et al., 2014; De Roeck et al., 2016; Ghosh, 2018; Ong et al., 2018). This work makes a theoretical contribution by investigating the three most important theoretical approaches in parallel using an experimental design (Study 3). A comparison of identification, justice, and meaningfulness will show whether they are equal in their explanation of the effect of CSR on employees or whether one explaining mechanism predominates the others and therefore should be assigned a central role in future theory developments.

### **Study 1 - The Relationship Between Perceived Corporate Social Responsibility and Employee-Related Attitudes and Behavior: A Meta-analysis**

Due to a large body of literature, much is already known about the relationships between CSR and several employee-related attitudes, such as job satisfaction, as well as behavior, such as OCB (e.g., Rupp & Mallory, 2015). However, a meta-analytical integration of research that provides a quantification of effect sizes is much needed and demanded (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Rupp & Mallory, 2015) to compare how different foci of CSR are related to different outcomes and to investigate social identity theory on a larger scale based on aggregated data. Such an integration complements and enhances insights from existing narrative reviews (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Glavas, 2016b; Jones & Rupp, 2017; Rupp & Mallory, 2015). Drawing on social identity theory, we tested identification as a mediator of the relationship between CSR and commitment, job satisfaction and OCB. We distinguished the focus of CSR (on people, planet, or profit) and tested several moderators (study design, subject group, age, gender, culture, and status and year of publication).

We conducted a meta-analysis using the approach by Schmidt and Hunter (2015), correcting for measurement error and sample size. Meta-analytical structural equation modeling was used to test mediation (Cheung, 2014; Jak, 2015). Studies were included that a) measured CSR on the individual level such as CSR perceptions, b) measured identification,

organizational commitment, job satisfaction, OCB, work engagement or attractiveness as a (prospective) employer, c) reported a correlation (or was computable), and d) involved participants who were employees or prospective employees (students in their last academic years) or students (only in experimental studies). The literature search, terminated in February 2019, yielded 132 included articles comprising 143 samples and a total of  $N = 89,396$  participants.

Mean corrected effect sizes for the relationship between CSR and employee-related attitudes and citizenship behaviors ranged from  $\rho = .36$  (for attractiveness) to  $\rho = .62$  (for engagement). For identification ( $\rho = .46$ ), commitment ( $\rho = .60$ ), job satisfaction ( $\rho = .54$ ), and OCB ( $\rho = .38$ ), the effect sizes were large (Bosco et al., 2015; Paterson et al., 2016). As assumed, the relationships were stronger for attitudes ( $\rho = .58$ ) than for behavior ( $\rho = .34$ ). Identification mediated the relation between CSR and commitment but not job satisfaction and OCB, which is a first indication that social identity theory may not be a suitable theoretical background for micro-CSR. For specific types of CSR, mean corrected correlations ranged from  $\rho = .37$  for the focus on the environment, to  $\rho = .47$  for the focus on employees, to  $\rho = .48$  for the focus in profit, to  $\rho = .54$  for the focus on society. For general CSR, which describes a focus on multiple aspects of CSR or no identifiable focus, we obtained  $\rho = .58$ . The results show that the degree of employee attitudes and behavior varies depending on the types of CSR activities. Relationships of CSR and employee-related attitudes are strongest when CSR initiatives focus on society, or if they cover several aspects. Age, gender and culture did not moderate the relationship between CSR and attitudes and behavior. In addition, we found that there is a lack of studies allowing for causal inference, such as an appropriate type of longitudinal studies or experimental studies. Therefore, in the following studies we applied an experimental design to investigate if identification is a suitable psychological mechanism to explain the effect of CSR on employees.

## **Study 2 - Scrutinizing Social Identity Theory in Corporate Social Responsibility: An Experimental Investigation**

Social identity theory is most often used as a theoretical background to explain how CSR affects employees. Identification is discussed as the most important psychological mechanism that explains the beneficial effects of CSR on employees. However, causality has been assumed in numerous studies, but there is not sufficient supporting data to justify assumptions of causality. To our knowledge, only one study on CSR and identification supported a causal relation (De Roeck et al., 2016).

To test if social identity theory is a suitable psychological mechanism in micro CSR research, we conducted an experimental vignette study. CSR was manipulated in three degrees — positive, neutral, and negative — and its impact on identification and, subsequently, commitment, job satisfaction, and OCB was measured. As mediation is defined as a transfer of causality from the independent variable to the dependent variable via the mediator, testing mediation requires an experimental design (Aguinis et al., 2020; Eden et al., 2015). Participants were  $N = 136$  employees. As social identity theory in organizations emphasizes that distinctiveness, prestige, and a salient out-group are needed for identification to arise, each vignette contained information on the distinctiveness, prestige, and salience of the fictitious organization's CSR initiatives. This information differed in degree according to the experimental condition. We used regression and mediation analysis with contrast coding of the experimental conditions to test our assumptions (Cohen et al., 2013; Hayes, 2018).

The results showed that CSR significantly predicted commitment ( $B = 1.27, p < .001$ ) and job satisfaction ( $B = .67, p < .001$ ) but not OCB ( $B = .06, p = .55$ ). This means that CSR in fact is the cause of increasing commitment and job satisfaction; it is not a mere correlational relation. CSR is responsible for an increase in employee attitudes, and alternative factors can be excluded. We found mediation effects through identification for the effect of CSR on commitment (95% *CI* for the indirect effect = [.01; .28], job satisfaction

(95%  $CI = [.003; .18]$ ), and OCB (95%  $CI = [.01; .25]$ ), but the effect of CSR on identification explained only little variance ( $R^2 = .04$ ). The successful mediation through identification might justify the large body of literature in favor of social identity theory, but the small variance explanation indicates that additional underlying mechanisms may exist that may explain the effect of CSR on employees even better. Therefore, in Study 3, we decided to compare identification to two alternative psychological mechanisms to gain important theoretical insights on how the beneficial effect of CSR on employees unfolds.

### **Study 3 - Identification, Justice, or Meaningfulness? An Experimental Investigation of the Psychological Mechanisms Responsible for the Effect of Corporate Social Responsibility on Employees**

One most important insight from Study 2 was that identification did not explain as much variance as the monopoly-like status of social identity theory in the micro-CSR literature might suggest. Other important but not as extensively researched psychological mechanisms are the organizational justice approach and the meaningfulness approach. According to the organizational justice framework, CSR perceptions are third-party justice observations: Employees observe how others are treated fairly through CSR. According to the meaningfulness approach, employees feel that they indirectly contribute to common welfare by working for a socially responsible organization.

To compare the three explaining mechanisms, we conducted an experimental vignette study methodologically similar to Study 2 ( $N = 189$  employees). To compare different psychological mechanisms, next to identification, we also measured justice and meaningfulness as mediators. In distinction from Study 2, the CSR initiatives were described in a theory-neutral way. This means that neither distinctiveness, prestige, and salience were addressed, nor justice- or meaningfulness-related information was given.

Concerning causality, this study supported the findings from Study 2. Apart from this, identification mediated the effect of CSR on commitment (95%  $CI$  for the indirect effect =

[.01; .08]), justice on all dependent variables (95% CI for indirect effects on commitment = [.11; .28], on job satisfaction = [.16; .44], on OCB = [.02; .17]), and meaningfulness on commitment (95% CI = [.02; .12]) and job satisfaction (95% CI [.06; .24]). The models containing all mediators (direct effects) explained 67% variance in commitment, 65% in job satisfaction, and 30% in OCB. To address the replication crisis in psychological research (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2018; Kepes & McDaniel, 2013; Munafò et al., 2017; Shrout & Rodgers, 2018), we conducted an exact replication, which yielded the same pattern of results ( $N = 131$  employees, sample size calculated *a priori* in both studies): Only the indirect effect through identification for the effect of CSR on OCB was inconsistent across the two studies (statistically insignificant in the main study, while significant in the replication study). The models containing all mediators (direct effects) explained 65% variance in commitment, 52% in job satisfaction, and 10% in OCB. Based on the amount of explained variance of CSR in identification and a statistical comparison of indirect effects, we concluded that justice was the strongest mediator. CSR explained 11% of variance in identification (replication study:  $R^2 = .10$ ), 36% in justice (replication:  $R^2 = .37$ ), and 12% in meaningfulness (replication:  $R^2 = .14$ ). Pairwise comparisons of indirect effects (Hayes, 2018; MacKinnon, 2000) yielded the following results in the main study: With regard to commitment, the following indirect effects were statistically different from each other, which means that confidence intervals did not contain zero: Justice was stronger than identification ( $\Delta = .15$ ) and meaningfulness ( $\Delta = .12$ ). With regard to job satisfaction, justice was stronger than identification ( $\Delta = .29$ ) and meaningfulness was stronger than identification ( $\Delta = .14$ ). With regard to OCB, justice was stronger than identification ( $\Delta = .09$ ).

Considering the important role that identification plays in numerous correlational studies, our findings are surprising and demand a critical reconsideration of established theoretical assumptions concerning the role of identification in CSR research. This study

makes a theoretical contribution by comparing three psychological mechanisms and identifying justice as central in explaining why employees react to CSR.

### **Meta-Analytical Integration of Experimental Studies**

To synthesize our research findings, I used meta-analytical structural equation modeling (Cheung, 2014; Jak, 2015), which allows for testing mediation models and the computation of indirect effects. In this meta-analysis, the data from the three conducted experiments were included (Study 2 and the main and replication studies of Study 3). The total sample consisted of  $N = 456$  employees ( $k = 3$ ). I tested the mediators — identification, justice and meaningfulness — in parallel. With regard to this meta-analytical structural equation method, results are corrected for dependencies between effect sizes and not all studies included have to fully report all correlations. Missing correlations are allowed as long as one study reports all correlations. The two samples from Study 3 provided all required correlations, and with regard to Study 2, correlations involving justice and meaningfulness were coded as missing.

For the relationships of CSR and employee-related attitudes and behavior, we obtained the following uncorrected pooled correlations: CSR and commitment ( $r = .57$ ), CSR and job satisfaction ( $r = .48$ ), and CSR and OCB ( $r = .14$ ). These correlations are statistically comparable to the uncorrected mean effect sizes computed according to the methods by Schmidt and Hunter (2015) reported in Study 1. The analysis of indirect effects showed that identification mediated the effects of CSR on commitment, but not on job satisfaction and OCB. The results are displayed in Table 1 and Figure 1.

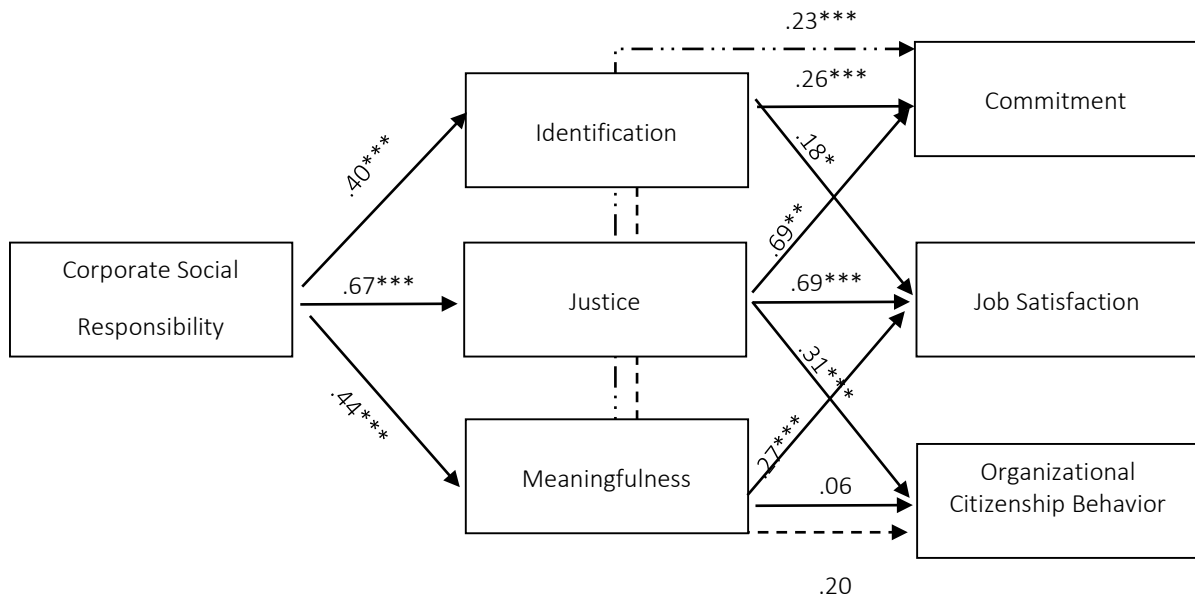


Figure 1. Meta-analytical structural equation model for the effects of CSR on commitment, job satisfaction and OCB, mediated by identification, justice and meaningfulness.

Table 1. Indirect Effects of the Meta-Analytical Mediation Model.

	Identification		Justice		Meaningfulness	
	Estimate	95% <i>CI</i>	Estimate	95% <i>CI</i>	Estimate	95% <i>CI</i>
CSR → Commitment	<b>.10</b>	[.07; .14]	<b>.47</b>	[.39; .55]	<b>.10</b>	[.06; .15]
CSR → Job Satisfaction	<b>.07</b>	[.01; .13]	<b>.46</b>	[.38; .56]	<b>.12</b>	[.07; .18]
CSR → OCB	.09	[-.05; .20]	<b>.21</b>	[.10; .32]	.03	[-.03; .08]

*Note.* CSR – corporate social responsibility, values in bold indicate statistical significance.

## General Discussion

In this work, we investigated the impact of CSR on employees and focused on underlying psychological mechanisms to learn *why* CSR affects employees. In Study 1, we build hypotheses on social identity theory and report a meta-analysis on the relationship between CSR and employee-related attitudes and behavior, that is, identification, commitment, job satisfaction, engagement, OCB, and attractiveness (as an employer). The effect sizes for the relation of CSR and attitudes and behavior were generally large, with larger effect sizes for attitudes. The effect sizes are very similar to the effect sizes reported by Zhao et al. (2020). Concerning the focus of CSR, we found the largest effect size for CSR with a focus on society in general. Identification mediated the relationship between CSR and commitment, but not job satisfaction and OCB. There was only a small number of studies allowing for causal inference such as longitudinal and experimental studies, which lead us to Study 2. In Study 2, we examined the causality of the relationship between CSR and commitment, job satisfaction and OCB, the most often investigated attitudes and behavior based on our meta-analysis, and we aimed for a thorough investigation of identification in explaining the effect of CSR on employees. The psychological mechanism of identification stems from social identity theory, and its applicability must first be scrutinized. Using an experimental vignette methodology, we found that the effect of CSR on commitment and job satisfaction is causal. Identification mediated the effect of CSR on commitment, job satisfaction, and OCB, but CSR explained only little variance in identification. This led to the assumption that further explaining mechanisms may explain the effect of CSR on employees better. In Study 3, an experimental vignette study methodologically similar to Study 2, we investigated the three most prominent psychological mechanisms in parallel: identification, justice, and meaningfulness. Comparing them, we identified justice as the best explaining mechanism, which can also be well observed in the results of my summarizing meta-analytical integration. The identification of justice as the strongest mechanism has far-



reaching implications for theory in micro-CSR, questioning the previously unwavering role of identification and promoting the central role of justice.

## **Theoretical Implications**

### ***The Focus of CSR***

We assumed that employees do not react to every CSR initiative equally. Instead, their reactions depend on the type or focus of CSR. In Study 1, we found the largest effect sizes for CSR focusing on the society in general (people), as compared to planet and profit. CSR focusing on employees and profit yielded comparable effect sizes, followed by CSR focusing on the natural environment. This seems surprising, as CSR focusing on employees — internal CSR — is directed towards and benefits employees (Rupp & Mallory, 2015), and therefore should be more relevant to employees compared to CSR targeted at external stakeholder groups such as the society in general. The society in general represents the main beneficiary of CSR, and employees seem to attach the most importance to the main goal of CSR, which is helping “people to live better lives” (Barnett et al., 2020, p. 33). This is consistent with the finding by Hameed et al. (2016), who found the relation of CSR and identification to be stronger for external than internal CSR.

Moreover, apart from specific foci, we found the largest effect size for general CSR involving multiple CSR foci or stakeholder groups. This means that for employees, CSR is most appealing when the organization’s strategy is holistic and involves various initiatives targeting several stakeholder groups. The finding that general CSR which involves multiple foci is most strongly associated with employee-related attitudes and behavior can be interpreted as a first indication that CSR initiatives have an additive effect in terms of “the more diverse, the better”. When CSR initiatives are directed at more than one stakeholder group, employees perceive a broader range and the probability increases that one of the initiatives appears extraordinary appealing to them.

The CSR initiatives investigated in Studies 2 and 3 depicted a variety of CSR initiatives. They focused on regional projects connected to the society in general and the natural environment. CSR was presented in different degrees, ranging from positive, to neutral, to negative. The better CSR was depicted, the better the employees perceived CSR and the more positively they reacted. The notion that a CSR strategy consisting of several actions is successful in increasing employees' commitment and job satisfaction supports the conclusion from Study 1 that holistic and diverse CSR strategies are most successful.

From Study 1, we also conclude that the impact of CSR on employees is rather universal. The relation of CSR and employee-related attitudes and behavior was not moderated by gender, age and culture. This means that employees react to CSR regardless if they are old or young, women or men (the database did not allow analyses on diverse gender), or live in individualistic or collectivist, masculine or feminine cultures.

### ***Effects of CSR on Attitudes and Behavior – The Question of Causality***

Our meta-analytical findings, which are mostly based on correlational studies, and our experimental studies (Study 2 and 3) show that CSR is much more strongly linked to attitudes than behavior. This is not surprising, as attitudes usually precede behavior (Humphrey et al., 2007; Mowday et al., 1979; Steers et al., 2004). However, the correlation of CSR and behavior we found is well above average compared to correlational effect sizes in the field of management (Paterson et al., 2016), which might suggest that CSR changes the employees' behavior positively. We did not find a causal effect of CSR on behavior, but this does not necessarily mean that CSR does not lead to behavioral changes; we can conclude from the rejection of a hypothesis only that we did not detect an effect. In Studies 2 and 3, CSR led to an increase in commitment and job satisfaction, but not OCB (except the replication study reported in Study 3). The meta-analytical integration of Studies 2 and 3 revealed a small relation of CSR and OCB, and showed that justice mediated the effect of CSR on OCB. Therefore, causality for behavior such as OCB still has to be investigated.

Concerning attitudes, the experimental studies (Studies 2 and 3) showed that the relationships between CSR, identification, commitment, and job satisfaction are causal. Future research still has to show whether causal relations also hold true for the other outcomes of the meta-analysis —engagement— that was not subject to the experimental investigation. Engagement has not been in the focus of micro-CSR, but it seems to be much more relevant than previously assumed. With regard to attractiveness, most research is experimental indicating a causal relation.

### *Psychological Mechanisms*

In our discussion of the psychological mechanisms, we primarily focus on social identity theory and the organizational justice approach. Up to now, researchers used social identity theory most often as a theoretical background to develop hypotheses on how CSR affects employees (Gond et al., 2017). Our results based on experiments allowing for causal inference reported in Studies 2 and 3 yield the surprising finding that identification does not play the most important role in explaining how employees react to CSR. Our results rather show that justice is most important. Last, we discuss the interplay of the mediators.

**Identification.** From Study 1, the meta-analysis comprising mostly correlational studies, we learned that identification mediated only the relationship between CSR and commitment, but not job satisfaction and OCB. The results based on the large aggregated dataset can be interpreted as a first indication that social identity theory is not a suitable theoretical background for micro-CSR as previously assumed (Gond et al., 2017).

In Study 2, we found identification mediating the effect of CSR on commitment, job satisfaction, and OCB. However, CSR did not explain much variance in identification, which did not fully support the applicability of social identity theory to micro-CSR. In Study 3, both the experimental main study and the replication study did not confirm all findings from Study 2. Contrary to Study 2, identification mediated only the effect of CSR on commitment in Study 3. The variance explanation of CSR in identification was comparably low. Compared to

other psychological mechanisms, identification did not turn out as the best explaining mechanism in micro-CSR.

We conclude that identification is not as important as previously assumed in micro-CSR and alternative psychological mechanisms are better at explaining how CSR affects employees. However, I would like to reflect on this surprising finding, as identification had a leading role in micro-CSR in the past (Gond et al., 2017). Social identification processes are primarily needed to categorize oneself and others in the surrounding environment (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1985). It is possible that employees categorize their and other organizations based on CSR (Collier & Esteban, 2007), but their feelings of belongingness to their organization are influenced by many other factors, and CSR may not be necessary for identification to arise and may serve as an additional, incremental source of identification-related perceptions. For example, leadership and relationships at work in general are regarded as important antecedents of identification (He & Brown, 2013). Social identification processes are fundamental and ubiquitous, not only in the workplace, making us feel as part of a group and guiding our behavior (Ashforth et al., 2008; Ashforth & Mael, 1989), but for explaining the impact of CSR on employees, so an explaining mechanism with more specific connections to CSR may be required.

**Justice.** We learned from the main and replication studies from Study 3 that justice perceptions play the most important role in explaining how employees react to CSR compared to identification and meaningfulness. Organizational justice matters to employees and guides their attitudes and behavior (Colquitt et al., 2013; Rupp et al., 2014). CSR as a specific form of third-party justice observations is a source of justice perceptions in organizations (Rupp, 2011).

To understand why justice of all psychological mechanisms under investigation has this special role, we must consider what distinguishes the three psychological mechanisms. The motives, why CSR matters to employees and therefore they react to CSR, help us to

explain the extraordinary role of justice. Justice is connected to three motives, while identification and meaningfulness are each connected to a single motive. Rupp (2011) distinguishes three motives explaining why employees care about CSR: instrumental, relational and moral motives.

CSR is connected to instrumental motives, because CSR provides additional information on justice that reduces uncertainty if the employer is trustworthy (Rupp, 2011), fulfilling employees' need for control (Cropanzano et al., 2001; Rupp et al., 2015). Moreover, employees infer that they also will be treated fairly if their organization engages in CSR (Jones et al., 2014; Rynes, 1991). CSR relates to relational motives, as it enables employees to be involved and to build further relationships, for example, by participating in volunteering programs, or designing CSR programs (Rupp, 2011), thereby satisfying the need for belonging (Cropanzano et al., 2001). This strengthens relationships between employees and their employer, colleagues, and external stakeholders as beneficiaries of CSR who develop shared identities (Rupp, 2011; Rupp et al., 2015). CSR is linked to moral motives, because employees might expect organizations to act responsibly as the "right thing to do" (Rupp, 2011, p. 85). This motive is connected to a universal moral norm and fulfills the need for meaningful existence (Cropanzano et al., 2001; Rupp et al., 2015; Rupp et al., 2018).

Identification primarily addresses employees' relational motives, because organizational identification is centered on feelings of belongingness to a group, here inside the organization (Rupp et al., 2015). Meaningfulness primarily addresses employees' moral motives (Rupp, 2011): CSR fulfills their need for meaningful existence by giving their work a higher purpose. Justice is connected to all motives in addressing employees' instrumental motives, relational motives, and moral motives: CSR serves as an "in-house justice judgment" (Rupp, 2011, p. 84), thereby appealing to the instrumental motive, the participation in CSR creates networks and relationships outside of the organization, thereby appealing to the relational motive (Rupp, 2011), and CSR appears morally as the right thing to do to promote

justice, thereby addressing the moral motive (Rupp, 2011). Justice, which is connected to all three motives explains its exceptional role in explaining employees' reactions to CSR.

The result that justice is the strongest psychological mechanism adds value not only to the CSR literature, but is also relevant for theory in the field of organizational justice research. In theoretical models that describe antecedents and consequences of justice, CSR could be added as an antecedent on the organizational level, or CSR perceptions could be added on the individual level (Greenberg, 2001). This would provide organizations an additional starting point for ensuring that employees feel treated fairly in the workplace.

**Interplay of Psychological Mechanisms.** Our work is, next to other rare exceptions (e.g., De Roeck et al., 2014; De Roeck et al., 2016; Zhao et al., 2020), the first attempt to test several psychological mechanisms simultaneously, and we can take a closer look at a future unifying theory on psychological mechanisms in micro-CSR: Other researchers focused on the interplay of identification and justice, and they found a sequential mediation, from CSR to justice to identification to job satisfaction (De Roeck et al., 2014), or assumed justice moderating the relationship between CSR and identification (De Roeck et al., 2016; Ghosh, 2018). Meaningfulness also was investigated as a moderator in the past: Ong et al. (2018) found meaningfulness moderating relationship between CSR and OCB, and they found stronger relationships with increased meaningfulness.

Based on these studies, it is conceivable that CSR affects justice, which, in turn, increases identification, and meaningfulness could play a moderating role (De Roeck et al., 2014; Ong et al., 2018). However, our research clarified the central role of justice and is also supported by the notion that justice is connected to all CSR-relevant motives. With the instrumental, relational, and moral motives in mind, identification and meaningfulness are not necessary for explaining how CSR affects employees, but they can add incremental value, supported by our finding that all mediators in one model yielded the best variance explanation (direct effects in Study 3).

## **Practical Implications**

In all three studies, we investigated CSR perceptions. For CSR to be perceived by employees, it is crucial that they are informed and aware of CSR in their organization. The participants in Studies 2 and 3 were directly confronted with CSR when they read the vignettes; in practice, CSR may easily be overlooked. Therefore, organizations should communicate CSR to their employees (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019; Du et al., 2010), such as in their intranet, in the company newsletter or in a printed company newspaper and brochures. Organizations are recommended to use a variety of communication channels (Du et al., 2010).

In their CSR communication, employers should follow our findings concerning the best explaining mechanism and focus on justice aspects and use justice-related language such as “through CSR, we are committed to a just world” or “promoting fairness through CSR”. The use of “we” associated with identification and language highlighting meaningfulness such “serving a higher purpose” may supplement the communication strategy.

Moreover, we recommend organizations to depict all aspects of their CSR strategy and not focus on a single aspect such as the environment alone. The meta-analysis reported in Study 1 showed that the largest effect sizes are obtained for general CSR, with a focus on two or more aspects of CSR. As our studies further revealed the important role of justice in micro-CSR, organizations should ensure that employees do not feel treated unfairly or left behind. Employees attach relatively little importance to internal CSR, but inconsistent CSR characterized by favoring external over internal stakeholders increases the employees’ turnover intentions and actual turnover, because this inconsistency is perceived as hypocritical (Scheidler et al., 2019). Such an imbalance might also be perceived as unfair.

Employees can contribute to the design of valuable CSR initiatives. For research, Barnett et al. (2020) demanded that the “CSR field should reconceive itself as a science of design in which researchers formulate CSR initiatives that seek to achieve specific social and environmental objectives” (p. 937). To a certain degree, organizations can also rely on this

approach by formulating goals and designing CSR according to these objectives. Employees should be given the opportunity to design CSR. A reflection on successful CSR initiatives or evaluative comparison will help to improve the CSR initiatives. Giving employees the opportunity to participate and to voice their opinions may increase their justice perceptions (Lind et al., 1990).

### **Strengths, Limitations, and Implications for Future Research**

With the meta-analysis (Study 1), we gave an overview of the state of research in micro-CSR. Although very recently a meta-analysis has been published on the same topic (Zhao et al., 2020), our meta-analysis adds value to the literature. First, in our analysis of CSR we were not restricted to a comparison of internal and external CSR, and we could compare people, planet, and profit, which is of practical value. Second, we compared attitudes to behavior and analyzed engagement that has been shown to be an important construct in CSR literature. Third, we compared correlational to experimental studies and analyzed the moderating roles of age, gender, and culture. Our findings indicate that the reactions to CSR are rather universal. Finally, in our database, we included more recent studies, and we gain certainty through a larger number of included primary studies. Compared to the analysis by Zhao et al. (2020), we included 53% more studies and our database is almost twice as large ( $k = 86$  vs.  $k = 132$ ;  $N = 50,607$  vs.  $N = 89,396$ ).

Moreover, in Study 2, we scrutinized the role of identification based on three factors that lead to the formation of identification. From a theoretical point of view, it was important to start from the basic assumptions of social identity theory in organizations (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) to investigate whether the underlying processes leading to identification — distinctiveness, prestige, and salience — apply to CSR. To better understand the role of identification, a comparison to other psychological mechanisms was necessary. We identified the most important psychological mechanisms from pertinent theoretical approaches and



compared them (Study 3). By scrutinizing established theoretical assumptions we discovered that justice is the most important psychological mechanism.

In order to increase the reliability of our results, we conducted an exact replication in Study 3, thereby reacting to the replication crisis in psychological research (e.g., Kepes & McDaniel, 2013; Shrout & Rodgers, 2018). In addition, to synthesize our research findings, we conducted a meta-analytical integration of the experimental studies reported in this work (Studies 2 and 3).

Based on the insights from the results of our studies, I identify open research fields. As this work was one of the first attempts to scrutinize established theoretical assumptions and test several explaining mechanisms in parallel, we decided in Studies 2 and 3 to manipulate CSR as a whole in three degrees and not to manipulate different foci. With the finding in mind that justice is the strongest explaining mechanism, the distinction of internal and external CSR now becomes even more important. CSR as depicted in the vignettes rather had an external focus. As described above, the combination of a lack of internal CSR with extraordinary external CSR might be perceived as unfair (De Roeck et al., 2014; De Roeck & Maon, 2018). Therefore, research comparing the effects of internal and external CSR on employee-related attitudes and behavior is especially needed.

Concerning the psychological mechanisms, we followed the rationale of individual theoretical approaches and therefore tested them in parallel to find out which one is the strongest. We identified that in future research, justice should be assigned a central role. This finding provides an important theoretical basis for future theory development.

In Studies 2 and 3, we contrasted positive CSR against neutral and negative CSR. Negative CSR may be interpreted as corporate social irresponsibility, but in all three studies, negative CSR was not rated extremely low in terms of CSR. Corporate social irresponsibility has been discussed as the opposite pole of CSR (Jones et al., 2009). In our study, we did not intend to depict corporate social irresponsibility; rather, we aimed for a negative degree of

CSR. Therefore, we cannot discuss corporate social irresponsibility, but we conclude that the better an organization's CSR is perceived, the stronger and more positive its influence on employees is. Findings from Study 3 support this: Examining the contrast, which compares the neutral condition against the negative condition, shows that neutral CSR has a more positive influence on commitment and job satisfaction than negative CSR, and justice is the strongest mediator of the relationship between CSR and all outcomes. Concerning corporate social irresponsibility, more research is needed. Parallel to job satisfaction, commitment, and OCB that we investigated, effects of corporate social irresponsibility on irritation, turnover intentions and counterproductive behavior are conceivable (Dalal, 2005; Joo & Park, 2010; Mohr et al., 2005).

Moreover, the negative side of CSR and downsides of psychological mechanisms should be investigated in future research. Recently, the downsides of identification are discussed. Generally, CSR is negatively associated with work addiction, but identification and meaningfulness buffer this effect, because employees may create such a strong relationship to their organization that they become willing to work more and to think about work in their free time (Brieger et al., 2020). Over-identification is associated with overcommitment, burnout, and unethical behavior (Avanzi et al., 2020; Conroy et al., 2017).

Concerning the research methods we used, I would like to point out the most important limitations of this work. Meta-analyses are subject to the quality of the included primary studies. We distinguished correlational survey studies and experiments, and we found larger effect sizes for correlational studies. Experimental studies are underrepresented and mostly focused on the examination of organizational attractiveness (Study 1). Therefore, our meta-analysis is an overview of micro-CSR and a starting point to identify open research fields. The meta-analytical results indicate the size of the relationships between CSR and employee-related attitudes and behavior, and the nature of the relationship — correlational or causal — still was to be investigated in Studies 2 and 3.

Experimental vignette methodology is one method among others allowing for causal interpretations. A combination of vignette methodology with another experimental design would have been preferable. For example, to determine the direction of causality, a longitudinal design measuring both the independent and dependent variables at two points in time is required. However, using vignette methodology allowed us to control interfering variables (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014), and to test the hypothesized direction of causality in terms of CSR affecting commitment, job satisfaction, and OCB. Aguinis et al. (2020) as well as Stone-Romero and Rosopa (2008) argue that many research designs do not allow causal inference and that an experimental design is required, which we addressed by choosing experimental vignette methodology. Following more specific considerations of experimental research designs, combining two randomized-controlled experimental designs, and manipulating the independent variable and the mediating variable separately in two sets of experiments combined with a subsequent synthesis is regarded as the current gold-standard to establish causality in mediation testing (Aguinis et al., 2020; Eden et al., 2015). We manipulated CSR as the independent variable in Studies 2 and 3 and synthesized our research findings. In future research, the psychological mechanisms, especially justice, should also be manipulated, following the recommendations by Eden et al. (2015).

Using vignette methodology did not restrict our studies to a single organization, which enhances generalizability. Our experimental results are restricted to Germany, but the meta-analytical results showed that culture did not moderate the relationship of CSR and employee reactions (Study 1), so they are generalizable to other countries beyond Germany.

## **Conclusion**

This work makes the following contributions to the CSR literature: The meta-analysis gives an overview of the state of research in micro-CSR by comparing the relations of CSR and six attitudes and behavioral outcomes in size and comparing different foci of CSR. We gained certainty concerning causality of CSR for commitment and job satisfaction. I conclude

that previously undisputed theoretical assumptions with regard to the role of identification have to be reconsidered. Rather, I propose that justice should be assigned a central role in micro-CSR. The innate desire of justice, which even has shaped a human image, the *homo reciprocans*, guides people's behavior. This work showed that the importance of justice is also prevalent in the workplace in general and especially in employees' perceptions of CSR. Employees react to CSR, because they regard CSR as an important indicator of justice. Employees no longer evaluate only classical job-related characteristics such as their salary as the *homo oeconomicus* would suggest, but also feel committed and draw satisfaction from their organization's engagement in social and environmental issues. Companies operating as social actors reflect global developments towards cooperation and common welfare. This engagement is seen by employees, evaluated as relevant for justice, and reacted upon.

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### **Statement of Authorship**

Hiermit erkläre ich, dass ich die vorliegende Dissertation "Why Corporate Social Responsibility Affects the Employee: Investigating Underlying Psychological Mechanisms" weder in der gegenwärtigen noch in einer anderen Fassung einer anderen Fakultät vorgelegt habe oder hatte. Ich versichere, dass ich die Dissertation selbstständig und ohne unerlaubte Hilfe angefertigt sowie unter ausschließlicher Verwendung der von mir angegebenen Quellen verfasst und wörtlich oder sinngemäß aus der Literatur entnommene Textstellen kenntlich gemacht habe. Ferner bestätige ich, dass ich den federführenden Beitrag zu den unter gemeinschaftlicher Autorenschaft entstandenen Manuskripten geleistet habe.

Bielefeld, im Dezember 2020

Agnieszka Paruzel

## Overview of Published and Submitted Work

### Study 1

Paruzel, A., Klug, H.J.P., & Maier, G.W. *The relationship between perceived corporate social responsibility and employee-related attitudes and behavior: A meta-analysis.*

[Manuscript submitted for publication]

Dataset: [https://osf.io/ztdhr/?view\\_only=d40074d69f4b4e0ebab8451953845278](https://osf.io/ztdhr/?view_only=d40074d69f4b4e0ebab8451953845278)

### Study 2

Paruzel, A., Danel, M., & Maier, G.W. (2020). Scrutinizing social identity theory in corporate social responsibility: An experimental investigation. *Frontiers in Psychology.*

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Dataset: <https://osf.io/xd5nr/>

### Study 3

Paruzel, A., Müller, A.T., Dukart, N., & Maier, G.W. *Identification, justice or meaningfulness? An experimental investigation of the psychological mechanisms responsible for the effect of corporate social responsibility on employees.* [Manuscript submitted for publication]

Datasets: [https://osf.io/mf6xp/?view\\_only=a73aee4f89b346fb8f5ccb7c0c35d515](https://osf.io/mf6xp/?view_only=a73aee4f89b346fb8f5ccb7c0c35d515)

## Overview of Published Articles and Manuscripts

(Status: 15.07.2021)

### Study 1

Paruzel, A., Klug, H. J. P., & Maier, G. W. (2021). The relationship between perceived corporate social responsibility and employee-related outcomes: A meta-analysis. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *12*, 607108. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.607108>

### Study 2

Paruzel, A., Danel, M., & Maier, G. W. (2020). Scrutinizing social identity theory in corporate social responsibility: An experimental investigation. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *11*, 580620. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.580620>

### Study 3

Paruzel, A., Müller, A.T., Dukart, N., & Maier, G.W. *Identification, justice or meaningfulness? An experimental investigation of the psychological mechanisms responsible for the effect of corporate social responsibility on employees.* [Manuscript]

Note. This is the status of the work as published in July 2021. In the following, the manuscripts are included in their original version upon submission of the dissertation to the Department of Psychology at Bielefeld University in December 2020.

Manuscript of Study 1  
(pre peer review version)

Paruzel, A., Klug, H.J.P., & Maier, G.W. *The relationship between perceived corporate social responsibility and employee-related attitudes and behavior: A meta-analysis.*

[Manuscript submitted for publication]

Dataset: [https://osf.io/ztdhr/?view\\_only=d40074d69f4b4e0ebab8451953845278](https://osf.io/ztdhr/?view_only=d40074d69f4b4e0ebab8451953845278)

# 1 The Relationship Between Perceived Corporate Social Responsibility 2 and Employee-Related Attitudes and Behavior: A Meta-analysis

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9 Number of words: 7,507, Tables: 4, and Figures: 5; Supplemental Material: 3 documents

10 **Keywords:** commitment, corporate social responsibility, identification, job satisfaction, meta-  
11 analysis, organizational citizenship behavior.

## 12 Abstract

13 In many companies, the implementation of corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become usual  
14 practice. This meta-analysis aims to synthesize research findings on the relationship between  
15 employees' perception of CSR and attitudes and citizenship behaviors (identification, engagement,  
16 organizational attractiveness, OCB, commitment or job satisfaction). A total of 143 studies ( $N =$   
17 89,396) were included in the meta-analysis. Mean effect sizes for the relationship between CSR and  
18 employee-related attitudes and citizenship behaviors ranged from  $\rho = .36$  (for attractiveness) to  $\rho =$   
19  $.62$  (for engagement). For attitudes ( $\rho = .58$ ), the relationships were stronger than for behavior ( $\rho =$   
20  $.34$ ). Identification mediated the relation between CSR and commitment but not job satisfaction and  
21 OCB. For specific types of CSR, they ranged from  $\rho = .37$  (environment focus) to  $\rho = .54$  (focus on  
22 society). Based on our results, we give recommendations concerning the design of CSR initiatives in  
23 a way that benefits employees. For future research, we suggest investigating causality by using  
24 longitudinal and experimental designs.

## 25 1 Introduction

26 You feel better about working for a place that is doing good things [...]. It increases your worker  
27 satisfaction, and loyalty, people are less likely to leave and more likely to do a good job, feel good  
28 about working here and instead of being, I think, dissatisfied and only here for the money (McShane  
29 and Cunningham, 2012).

30 The preceding quote was provided by an employee interviewed about corporate social responsibility  
31 (CSR). What does “doing good things” mean? Examples of CSR initiatives are donations, corporate  
32 volunteering programs, improving employee diversity issues and environmental protection (Rupp  
33 and Mallory, 2015). The implementation of CSR programs and initiatives has already become usual  
34 practice in many companies worldwide. For example, 92% of the 250 largest companies worldwide  
35 reported on CSR, in the UK 97% of the N100 companies (KPMG International, 2015).

36 For the past decades, CSR was examined from the companies' perspective by sociologists and  
37 economists, termed macro CSR. While several meta-analyses on CSR on the organizational level

38 already exist (e.g. of corporate social performance on financial performance) reporting a low to  
39 medium mean effect size (Margolis, J. D., Elfenbein, H. A., & Walsh, J. P.; Orlitzky et al., 2003), the  
40 individual level has not yet been investigated meta-analytically. Now it is time to take the employees'  
41 perspective, as they are strongly involved in CSR by planning, participating in, and witnessing CSR  
42 (Rupp and Mallory, 2015; De Roeck and Maon, 2018). Micro CSR is “the study of the effects and  
43 experiences of CSR (however it is defined) on individuals (in any stakeholder group) as examined at  
44 the individual level” (Rupp and Mallory, 2015) and is strongly demanded (Aguinis and Glavas, 2012;  
45 Gond et al., 2017; Rupp and Mallory, 2015).

46 The intent of this work is to meta-analytically answer the question of whether CSR is positively  
47 associated with employee-related attitudes and behavior, namely identification, engagement,  
48 commitment, job satisfaction, attractiveness to potential employees, and organizational citizenship  
49 behavior. These constructs are derived from Aguinis and Glavas' comprehensive review (Aguinis  
50 and Glavas, 2012) on an analysis of CSR on the organizational, institutional, and individual level.  
51 CSR creates a benefit for society as a whole while at the same time creating a personal benefit for the  
52 employees (Glavas, 2016), which is the focus of this manuscript.

53 This meta-analysis makes the following contributions: We quantify the relationship between CSR  
54 and employee-related attitudes and citizenship behaviors by synthesizing research findings in micro  
55 CSR. This will complement insights from previously published reviews (Aguinis and Glavas, 2012;  
56 Glavas, 2016; Rupp and Mallory, 2015). Moreover, drawing on social identity theory, we test  
57 identification as a mediator of the relationship between CSR and other outcomes such as  
58 commitment. Based on our results, we derive future research issues. Concerning practice, we learn  
59 about the importance of involving employees in CSR and how to design CSR initiatives in a way that  
60 benefits employees.

61 We start by giving an outline of corporate social responsibility. According to the triple bottom  
62 line of sustainability by Elkington (Elkington, 1994) three domains have to be taken into account  
63 simultaneously by an organization to be sustainable: people, planet and profit. The triple bottom line  
64 has transferred to CSR and is now widely used within the field (Aguinis, 2011; Swanson and  
65 Orlitzky, 2017). We assume that different types of CSR – specifically CSR that focuses on people,  
66 the planet or profit – have different impacts on employee-related attitudes and citizenship behaviors.  
67 The term *people*, corresponds to a social focus of CSR, meaning that CSR is aiming at improving the  
68 welfare of society (Bergmans, 2006). As we focus on employees, we distinguish between *people-*  
69 *employee* (focus on an organization's own employees) and *people-society* (focus on society in  
70 general). *Planet* refers to a focus on the natural environment, aiming for ecological quality  
71 (Bergmans, 2006). *Profit* reflects an economic focus, adding value to economic prosperity  
72 (Bergmans, 2006). The profit category includes acting financially profitable, lowering costs and  
73 paying taxes, but can also include corporate donations. There are also alternative models and CSR  
74 concepts (Carroll, 1991; El Akremi et al., 2018; Turker, 2009; Wartick and Cochran, 1985; Wood,  
75 1991), which can be integrated into the triple bottom line.

76 Researchers rely on a variety of psychological theories to explain the association of CSR and  
77 employee-related attitudes and behaviors. According to a review by Gond and colleagues (Gond et  
78 al., 2017), social identity theory was the most widely used theory to explain working mechanisms of  
79 CSR on employee-related attitudes and citizenship behaviors. Other theoretical frameworks build  
80 upon fairness (Rupp et al., 2006) by regarding CSR as third-party justice observations. Employees  
81 perceiving CSR witness third parties – the beneficiaries of CSR – being treated fairly and assume  
82 that the company would also treat them fairly. Following similar assumptions, signaling theory  
83 explains how job applicants perceive CSR as a signal how their future working conditions in a  
84 company will be (Rynes, 1989). Others argue that working for a socially responsible company makes



85 work more meaningful by contributing to the welfare of society (Aguinis and Glavas, 2019). For an  
86 overview of theoretical frameworks, see Rupp and Mallory (Rupp and Mallory, 2015).

87 To formulate a research question and derive hypotheses, we mainly rely on social identity theory  
88 because it is not only relevant for one specific outcome but can also explain the relationships of CSR  
89 and the other employee-related attitudes and citizenship behavior under investigation. According to  
90 De Roeck and Delobbe (De Roeck and Delobbe, 2012), identification is a fundamental psychological  
91 process explaining why CSR can change organizational attitudes. Social identity theory (Tajfel and  
92 Turner, 1979) assumes that people make self-definitions based on social category memberships. For  
93 example, a basic social category is gender or profession. Later, this theory has been applied to the  
94 organizational context and this specific form of social identification is organizational identification  
95 (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). We refer to this theory as social identity theory in the organization  
96 (SITO) (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Moreover, people strive to identify with favorable social  
97 categories which are able to enhance their self-esteem (Hogg and Turner, 1985; Tajfel, 1978). A  
98 company's engagement in CSR is supposed to be a favorable and prestigious social attribute (Turker,  
99 2009; Brammer et al., 2007; Peterson, 2004).

100 According to SITO, three factors determine the extent to which employees develop a feeling of  
101 belongingness to their organization (Ashforth and Mael, 1989): distinctiveness, prestige, and salience  
102 of the out-groups. Distinctiveness is the uniqueness of values and practices of a group compared to  
103 other groups (Oakes and Turner, 1986), prestige designates the company's perceived prestige, and  
104 salience of out-groups increases the awareness of one's in-group (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). This  
105 means that employees identify more likely with their company if their CSR initiatives and programs  
106 are distinct and prestigious. When employees become aware of other companies' engagement in  
107 CSR, this simultaneously increases the awareness of CSR in their own company. De Roeck and  
108 colleagues found that the mere presence of CSR, the fact that a company engages in CSR – which  
109 means that employees not necessarily have to participate in CSR – increases identification, mediated  
110 by prestige (De Roeck et al., 2016).

111 Apart from identification, SITO can also explain the relationship between CSR and other attitudes  
112 such as engagement – a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor,  
113 dedication and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2006). Engaged employees are energized and enthusiastic  
114 about their work. Dedication is especially characterized by a strong involvement in work and the  
115 experience of a sense of significance (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008), elicited by distinct CSR  
116 initiatives and programs. Distinctiveness and prestige of CSR initiatives lead to a sense of  
117 significance, and, ultimately, engaged employees.

118 Concerning attractiveness to potential employees – associated with an applicant's willingness to  
119 pursue jobs and to accept job offers in an organization (Tsai and Yang, 2010) – we assume that  
120 prospective employees strive for a membership in a socially responsible company. This membership  
121 is supposed to enhance their self-esteem (Smith and Langford, 2011). The prestige due to the  
122 company's engagement in CSR leads to the company being perceived as attractive to potential  
123 employees.

124 Organizational commitment consists of three components (Allen and Meyer, 1990; Meyer and  
125 Allen, 1997): Employees are committed to their organization due to an emotional bond (affective  
126 commitment), due to moral-ethical reasons (normative commitment) or due to cost avoidance  
127 resulting from job change (continuance commitment) (Meyer and Allen, 1991). As SITO suggests,  
128 CSR is associated with organizational identification. Therefore, self-esteem derived from this  
129 membership will lead to an emotional bond (affective commitment). Moreover, as the company

130 makes social investments, the employees may feel obliged to stay at the company (normative  
131 commitment). The employees want to retain this favorable group membership.

132 SITO is also applicable to job satisfaction - a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting  
133 from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences (Locke, 1976). The favorable characteristics of a  
134 company, e.g. CSR engagement, are associated with prestige and feelings of pride. These feelings  
135 evoke job satisfaction (Ellemers et al., 2011).

136 The processes underlying social identity theory not only relate to organizational attitudes, but are  
137 also associated with behavioral outcomes (Ashforth et al., 2008). When people categorize themselves  
138 in terms of their membership of a company engaging in CSR and identify with a socially responsible  
139 organization, they are inclined to behave according to the values associated with this group  
140 membership (Ellemers et al., 1999). CSR provides a behavioral guideline in terms of citizenship  
141 behavior (Lin et al., 2010b) or the employees do not want to remain beneficiaries but to contribute on  
142 their own by means of OCB (Chun et al., 2013; Hansen et al., 2011).

143 Already well known is that CSR perceived by employees is positively associated with several  
144 attitudes and citizenship behaviors. To learn about the magnitude of these relationships, we aim to  
145 synthesize research findings meta-analytically:

146 *Research Question:* How large are the effect sizes of the relationships between CSR and  
147 employee-attitudes (identification, engagement, commitment, job satisfaction and attractiveness) and  
148 citizenship behaviors (OCB)?

149 We distinguish between attitudes and behaviors (Gond et al., 2017), as we assume that CSR  
150 affects them differently. As it is easier to influence attitudes than behavior (Ajzen et al., 1980), we  
151 assume that CSR is stronger when associated with attitudes (identification, engagement,  
152 commitment, job satisfaction and attractiveness) than behavioral outcomes (OCB). In their review,  
153 Ashforth et al. (Ashforth et al., 2008) point out that identity behaviors are part of the process of  
154 identification but are not at the core of their model, where self-definitions and affect, followed by  
155 beliefs are. Some studies report weaker relationships between CSR and OCB than between CSR and  
156 commitment or job satisfaction (Choi and Yu, 2014; Evans et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2014).

157 *Hypothesis 1:* The relationship between CSR and employee-related attitudes (identification,  
158 engagement, commitment, job satisfaction and attractiveness) is stronger than the relationship  
159 between CSR and employee-related behavioral outcomes (OCB).

160 We assume that the CSR foci (e.g. people, planet and profit according to Elkington (Elkington,  
161 1994)) each have different impacts on employee-related attitudes and citizenship behaviors. The  
162 differential relationship of the particular CSR foci and employee-related attitudes and citizenship  
163 behaviors is supported by empirical data (Smith and Langford, 2011; Lin et al., 2010a; Stites and  
164 Michael, 2011). For example, research findings show that the strength of the relationship between  
165 CSR and identification depends on the focus of CSR (Farooq et al., 2017). CSR towards the  
166 community as well as internal CSR (counted among *people*) showed the highest correlation with  
167 identification, whereas CSR towards the environment (counted among *planet*) correlated least. We  
168 assume that initiatives with a focus on *people* are more strongly related to all employee-related  
169 attitudes and citizenship behaviors under investigation than CSR focusing *planet* and *profit*, as these  
170 initiatives directly impact the employees in their workplace (De Roeck and Maon, 2018).

171 *Hypothesis 2:* The mean effect size is moderated by the CSR focus. The relationships between the  
172 foci of CSR and employee-related attitudes and citizenship behaviors are strongest for CSR with the  
173 focus on *people*.

174 SITO serves as a theoretical framework to explain the relationship between CSR and  
 175 identification, which, in turn, is associated with further outcomes such as commitment, job  
 176 satisfaction and OCB. Therefore, we formulate the following hypothesis:

177 *Hypothesis 3:* CSR and a) employee-related attitudes (engagement, commitment, job satisfaction  
 178 and attractiveness) and b) citizenship behaviors (OCB) are mediated by identification.

## 179 2 Method

### 180 2.1 Inclusion Criteria

181 We defined several inclusion criteria for eligible studies. First, CSR had to be measured on the  
 182 individual level, for example CSR perceptions. Second, at least one of the following criteria had to be  
 183 measured: organizational identification, work engagement, attractiveness as a (prospective)  
 184 employer, OCB, organizational commitment or job satisfaction. Third, a correlation between CSR  
 185 and the employee-related outcome had to be reported. Studies were also included if they provided  
 186 enough information to compute a correlation or enabled transformation into a correlation, except of  
 187 regression coefficients (Roth et al., 2018). Fourth, participants had to be employees or prospective  
 188 employees, more precisely students in their last academic years. In experimental studies, participants  
 189 had to be either employees or students. Studies were excluded if the study population were  
 190 customers. Our sample includes studies from several countries and studies with various research  
 191 designs.

### 192 2.2 Search Strategy

193 In order to identify potential studies to be included in the meta-analysis, a computer-based search  
 194 was conducted. The following databases were scanned: PsycINFO, SSCI and EconLit. The key  
 195 words used were: *corporate social responsibility, social responsibility, socially responsible,*  
 196 *corporate responsibility, corporate responsible, CSR, philanthropy, corporate charitable*  
 197 *contributions, charitable contributions, corporate citizenship, corporate conscience, corporate*  
 198 *donations, environmental performance, social performance, responsible business, greenwashing,*  
 199 *corporate sponsorship, identification, engagement, attractiveness, organizational citizenship*  
 200 *behavior, OCB, organizational citizenship behavior, contextual performance, prosocial*  
 201 *organizational behavior, prosocial behavior, extra-role behavior, commitment, job satisfaction, work*  
 202 *satisfaction and employee satisfaction.* The key words have been limited to the title or abstract and, if  
 203 possible, search results were limited to empirical studies (PsycINFO). Unpublished studies were  
 204 eligible. After removing duplicates, 3398 studies remained for examination. Fig 1 contains a flow  
 205 chart with details concerning inclusion and exclusion of studies. The most studies were excluded  
 206 because they did not report CSR or the abbreviation was used otherwise (customer service  
 207 representative, chemical safety report, etc.). Some publications reported same samples, so the older  
 208 ones were excluded ( $k = 2$ ). If articles or required data were not available, the authors were contacted.  
 209 In most cases, unavailable articles were dissertation theses and no author contact information was  
 210 given in the paper or on faculty homepages. The search was terminated by the end of February 2019.  
 211 In sum, 132 articles comprising 143 effect sizes were included in the meta-analysis resulting in a  
 212 total sample size of  $N = 89,396$ .

### 213 2.3 Coding Procedures

### 214 2.3.1 General Coding Procedures

215 To validate the coding procedures, eligible studies were coded by two independent coders  
 216 applying a standardized coding manual. The second coder, a subject matter expert, coded 20% of  
 217 randomly selected studies and intercoder agreement was assessed. For continuous data, a two-way  
 218 random single measure intraclass correlation (ICC 2.1) was computed. The ICCs for the variables  
 219 year of publication, sample size, gender, age, culture, effect size  $r$  and the reliabilities of the  
 220 measurement of CSR and the attitudes and citizenship behaviors ranged from .92 to 1. Cohen's kappa  
 221 was computed for categorical data (Cohen, 1968): study design, subject group, and CSR focus and  
 222 outcome measure and ranged from  $\kappa = .97$  to  $\kappa = 1$ . Disagreements were resolved by discussion.

223 To assess study quality and to judge its (potential) influences, study design features were coded  
 224 and investigated as moderators: study design, publication status (published or not) and year of  
 225 publication.

### 226 2.3.2 Coding of Moderating Variables

227 In meta-analysis, all subsample analyses are statistically termed moderator analysis. Following  
 228 this rationale, distinguishing different outcomes or distinguishing between attitudes and behavior are  
 229 moderator analyses, although they are not conceptual moderators.

#### 230 2.3.2.1 Employee-related Attitudes and Citizenship Behaviors.

231 We classified the employee-related attitudes and behaviors as follows: identification, engagement,  
 232 attractiveness to (potential) employees, commitment, job satisfaction (attitudes) and organizational  
 233 citizenship behavior. They could be measured directly (i.e., published standardized scales) or  
 234 indirectly (turnover as an indicator of attractiveness). Table A (online supplement) contains detailed  
 235 information on the operationalization of all constructs for each study included in the meta-analysis.  
 236 Attractiveness was either measured by organizational attractiveness scales, or turnover intentions and  
 237 actual turnover. In the latter case, reported values were recoded, aiming at a positive expression of  
 238 the construct attractiveness. When constructs were named similar to the ones we defined (e.g.  
 239 stakeholder-company identification), or items were self developed, we performed an in-depth  
 240 examination of construct definitions and items in the respective publication.

#### 241 2.3.2.2 Focus of CSR.

242 As measurement of CSR can focus on different aspects of CSR, the focus of the CSR  
 243 measurement was registered by using the following categories: people-society, people-employee,  
 244 planet, profit, general. This category system is based on Elkington's conceptualization named Triple  
 245 Bottom Line (Elkington, 1994). The category *people*, implied a social orientation of CSR. Because  
 246 employees are the focus of this meta-analysis, we differentiated between a focus on a company's own  
 247 employees (people-employee) and a focus on society in general (people-society). *People-society*  
 248 included the following exemplary terms: ethical, discretionary, legal, philanthropic, CSR to  
 249 government and CSR to customers. Volunteerism programs were counted among the *people-*  
 250 *employee* category. If the focus of a people-focused CSR measure was not clear, *people-society* was  
 251 coded. *Planet* included environmental aspects of CSR, whereas the category *profit* included  
 252 economic or financial aspects of CSR. The category *general* was assigned if it focused on multiple  
 253 aspects of CSR or if no specific focus was identifiable. This categorization does not contradict other  
 254 authors' CSR conceptualizations (Carroll, 1991; El Akremi et al., 2018; Turker, 2009).

#### 255 2.3.2.3 Study Design and Population Characteristics.

256 Gender was coded by recording the percentage of males in the study population (or computed  
 257 from the percentage of women or absolute frequencies). As the majority of research suggests that  
 258 there are cultural differences of CSR practices and the perception of CSR (Farooq et al., 2017; Dögl

259 and Holtbrügge, 2014; Küskü and Zarkada-Fraser, 2004) and others argue that CSR may be a  
 260 universal phenomenon (Quazi and O'Brien, 2000), we included culture among the population  
 261 characteristics variables. Culture was assessed by means of the individualism/collectivism and  
 262 masculinity/femininity dimensions of culture by Hofstede (2010b) which enabled to assign a score  
 263 between 1 and 100 to each country. These two dimensions are most widely used in the context of  
 264 CSR and culture (Hofman and Newman, 2014; Smith et al., 2011). High scores indicate an  
 265 individualistic or masculine culture. Subject groups were assessed by assigning each study to one of  
 266 these categories: employees, students, mixed (employees and students) and other.

267 Study design was coded by recording if the study design was a) predictive or concurrent and if b)  
 268 the study was a survey study, experimental or quasi-experimental study. If the predictor and the  
 269 criterion were measured simultaneously, the design was concurrent. If there was a time lag between  
 270 the assessment of the predictor and criterion, the design was predictive. In order to assess publication  
 271 bias, the status (published vs. unpublished) and year of publication were recorded.

## 272 2.4 Statistical Methods

273 For this meta-analysis, we applied the meta-analytical methods of Schmidt and Hunter (Schmidt  
 274 and Hunter, 2015) and chose a random effects model, because systematic effects of study-level  
 275 influences are assumed and moderating effects will be analyzed. Hence, the risk of overestimating  
 276 the effect, as it would be the case using a fixed effects model, is diminished. Effect size metrics were  
 277 correlation coefficients. In order to compute the mean corrected correlation coefficient  $\rho$ , effect sizes  
 278 were weighted by sample size and corrected for measurement artifacts, specifically unreliability of  
 279 the predictor and the criterion. A 95% confidence interval (CI) was computed for the mean  
 280 correlation  $\rho$  and indicated the significance of  $\rho$ : the mean effect size is significant if the confidence  
 281 interval does not include zero.

282 If data were not reported in the primary studies, we conducted transformations where possible. For  
 283 example, if  $r$  was not reported, we transformed Cohen's  $d$  into  $r$  using a formula correcting for  
 284 unequal group sizes (Borenstein et al., 2011). Standardized regression coefficients and standardized  
 285 coefficients obtained in SEM were not transformed, following the recommendations by Roth et al.  
 286 (Roth et al., 2018). Instead, the authors were contacted and asked if they would provide the required  
 287 correlations. If reliabilities were not reported and coded as not available, these values were  
 288 substituted by the mean of all reliabilities during the meta-analytical procedures. If constructs were  
 289 measured by means of single-item-measures, a reliability of  $\alpha = .70$  was assigned (Wanous and  
 290 Hudy, 2001). If correlations were obtained from SEM or confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), we  
 291 coded the reliability as  $\alpha = 1$ , because these correlations already are corrected in terms of  
 292 measurement error. In unclear cases, such as if a study reported a CFA but used regression to test  
 293 hypotheses, we assumed that the CFA was only conducted to assess the factor structure and quality  
 294 of measurement instruments and did not adjust the reliability. In even more unclear cases, we made  
 295 conservative decisions by assigning  $\alpha = 1$  to not overestimate effects. If studies reported more than  
 296 one effect size, a composite correlation and reliability was computed as recommended by Schmidt  
 297 and Hunter (using the Spearman Brown formula for composite reliabilities) (Schmidt and Hunter,  
 298 2015).

299 Heterogeneity was measured by means of the Q-statistic, the credibility interval (CR), variance  
 300 accounted for by artifacts (%  $VE$ ) and  $I^2$ . The Q-statistic assesses heterogeneity among the effect  
 301 sizes by computing the ratio of total observed variation to the within-study error (Borenstein et al.,  
 302 2011). A statistically significant Q-value indicates heterogeneity. Moreover, an 80% credibility  
 303 interval was computed. If it contains zero, the results should not be generalized (Whitener, 1990).

304 Koslowsky and Sagie (Koslowsky and Sagie, 1993) offer a rule of thumb and propose searching for  
 305 moderating effects, if this interval is broader than  $r = .11$ . Furthermore, the  $I^2$  statistic is reported  
 306 which indicates the ratio of total variation in study estimates that is due to heterogeneity (Higgins and  
 307 Thompson, 2002).  $I^2$  ranges from 0 to 100% (Borenstein et al., 2011) and the sample can be regarded  
 308 as heterogeneous, if this value exceeds 75%.

309 To investigate moderating effects, two strategies were applied: subsample analysis and meta-  
 310 regression. If the moderator of interest was a categorical variable, the overall sample was divided into  
 311 subsamples, which were then analyzed separately. Analyses were computed if subsamples contained  
 312 at least three datasets. A significant difference was then assessed by computing the value  $Q_{bet}$ . The  
 313 total variance  $Q$  consists of within-study variance ( $Q_{with}$ ) and between-study variance ( $Q_{bet}$ ). The  
 314 amount of between-study variance and its statistical significance indicate if the subsamples are  
 315 statistically different from each other. Further indices and procedures can serve for the interpretation  
 316 of the moderators (narrowing of the confidence intervals after moderator analysis, increase in %VE  
 317 and decrease in  $I^2$ ), but we primarily used the overlap of confidence intervals and the  $Q_{bet}$ -statistic to  
 318 assess significance of the moderator variable. If confidence intervals do not overlap, there is a  
 319 statistical difference between two subsamples. Even if confidence intervals overlap, subsamples can  
 320 differ and the  $Q_{bet}$  statistic indicates if there is a difference among all subsamples analyzed in the  
 321 corresponding subsample analysis (Howell and Howell, 2008; Klug and Maier, 2015). If the  
 322 moderator of interest was a continuous variable, meta-regression was applied which is analogous to  
 323 multiple regression (Cooper, 2010a).

324 Mediation was tested using meta-analytical structural equation modeling, more specifically using  
 325 the two-stage structural equation modeling approach (TSSEM) (Cheung, 2015; Jak, 2015). In the first  
 326 stage, the correlations of the correlation matrix are pooled and then this pooled correlation matrix is  
 327 used for the structural equation model in stage 2. Studies must have reported the correlation between  
 328 CSR and identification and the correlation between identification and at least another outcome (and  
 329 all intercorrelations) to be included in the TSSEM. The model fit is evaluated using the chi square  
 330 model of fit and the Root Mean Squared Error or Approximation (RMSEA) (Steiger and Lind, 1980,  
 331 May).

332 Publication bias was addressed by means of a trim-and-fill funnel plot (Duval and Tweedie,  
 333 2000b; Duval and Tweedie, 2000a). As the probability of publication was higher for manuscripts  
 334 with significant than non-significant results, meta-analysis is prone to a bias overestimating the mean  
 335 effect size. Results are displayed in a graph, which enables a visual examination of the presence of  
 336 publication bias. If the data points are distributed symmetrically around the mean, this is an indicator  
 337 that the meta-analysis is not biased and that the mean effect is not overestimated (Borenstein et al.,  
 338 2011).

339 The software R (version 4.1.2) and the packages psychmeta (main analysis) (Dahlke and Wiernik,  
 340 2019), metafor (meta-regression and funnel plot) (Viechtbauer, 2010), metaSEM (mediation)  
 341 (Cheung, 2015), and rmeta (forest plot) (Lumley, 2012) were used for the computations.

### 342 **3 Results**

#### 343 **3.1 Characteristics of the Database**

344 As mentioned above, 132 articles comprising 143 effect sizes were included in the meta-analysis.  
 345 Table 1 gives an overview of the database's characteristics. With regard to gender and culture, the  
 346 sample of studies was nearly balanced.

### 3.2 Examination of Differential Influences of CSR on Employee-Related Attitudes and Citizenship Behaviors (Moderators)

In meta-analyses, the examination of variables that explain the heterogeneity of the main effect are statistically termed moderators. Technically, one effect size from each sample is included in and is synthesized to an overall effect, but in this case, an overall effect size would be misleading as this would require to merge, e.g., attitudes and behavior. The subsample analyses of the specific outcomes, attitudes and behaviors as well as the CSR foci were statistically treated as moderator analyses. Not all of these analyses are based on conceptual moderators, rather they are termed moderators following the meta-analytical rationale.

#### 3.2.1 Differential Influences of CSR on Employee-related Attitudes and Citizenship Behavior

Following our research question, the primary aim of the study was to investigate how strong the relationships between (perceived) CSR and employee-related attitudes and citizenship behaviors are. The examination of the average effect sizes revealed differences as to the size of the mean corrected effect size. The effect sizes were medium to large ranging from  $\rho = .36$  for attractiveness, followed by  $\rho = .38$  for OCB,  $\rho = .46$  for identification,  $\rho = .54$  for job satisfaction and  $\rho = .60$  for commitment to  $\rho = .62$  for engagement. The value of  $Q_{bet} = 1,551.39$  ( $p < .001$ ) indicates that there were differences concerning the outcomes (Table 2). The examination of the confidence intervals reveals that the effect size for attractiveness was smaller than all other effect sizes except OCB, and the effect size for engagement was larger than the effect sizes for identification, OCB, and attractiveness. As the confidence intervals did not include zero, all correlations were significantly different from zero. Furthermore, the effects can be generalized, because the credibility intervals did not include zero.

#### 3.2.2 Relationships Between CSR and Attitudes and Behavior

To investigate if there is a difference between attitudes and behavior, we divided the database into two subsamples – studies measuring attitudes and studies measuring behavioral outcomes. The effect size for the relationship between CSR and attitudes is  $\rho = .58$ , and for behavior  $\rho = .34$ . The confidence intervals did not overlap, which indicates that these differences were statistically significant (Table 2), so hypothesis 1 was supported, which stated that the relationship between CSR and attitudes is stronger than the relationship between CSR and behavioral outcomes.

### 3.3 Differential Influence of CSR Focus

Separate analysis of the CSR focus showed that there are differences in the relationship between the particular focus and employee-related attitudes and citizenship behaviors ( $Q_{bet} = 294.04$ ,  $p < .001$ ). For *general*, which combines all different types of CSR, we obtained the largest effect size:  $\rho = .58$ . Next, we analyzed the specific foci. For *people-society*, we obtained the largest effect sizes of  $\rho = .54$  for *people-society*. The effect sizes for the other foci ranged from  $\rho = .37$  to  $\rho = .48$  (Table 2). Hypothesis 2 was not fully supported: Although the Q-statistic was significant, some confidence intervals strongly overlap. The effect sizes for *people* are only larger compared to *planet*, but not larger compared to *profit*. In Fig 2, effect sizes are displayed visually by means of a forest plot.

### 3.4 Identification as a Mediator of the Relation Between CSR and Employee-related Attitudes and Behaviors

Based on a subsample of studies reporting the correlations between CSR and identification (path A), identification and any other outcome (path B) and CSR and the outcome (path C), we specified a meta-analytical structural equation model to test if identification mediated the relationship between

390 CSR and other employee-related attitudes and behavior. The database contained sufficient  
 391 correlations to investigate commitment ( $k = 7$ ), job satisfaction ( $k = 7$ ) and OCB ( $k = 10$ ) as outcomes  
 392 in a single model accounting for intercorrelations between all variables under investigation ( $k = 19$ ,  $N$   
 393  $= 5,233$ ). Fig 3 displays the results of the meta-analytical structural equation model. All correlations  
 394 were significant and the model fitted the data ( $X^2 = 78.40$ ,  $df = 6$ ,  $RMSEA = .048$ ). The indirect  
 395 effect for the relation between CSR and commitment was significant, as it did not contain zero  
 396 (indirect effect = .23, 95%  $CI$  [.15; .33], direct effect = .24, 95%  $CI$  [-.01; .49]). The indirect effects  
 397 for the relations between CSR and job satisfaction (indirect effect = -.01, 95%  $CI$  [-.07; .07], direct  
 398 effect = .17, 95%  $CI$  [.01; .41]) and OCB (indirect effect = .05, 95%  $CI$  [-.10; .20], direct effect = .16,  
 399 95%  $CI$  [-.01; .32]) were statistically not significant. Hypothesis 3 cannot be supported, as  
 400 identification only mediated the relation between CSR and commitment, but not job satisfaction and  
 401 OCB, respectively.

### 402 3.5 Further analyses

#### 403 3.5.1 Population Characteristics

404 Results show that the relationship between CSR and employee-related attitudes and citizenship  
 405 behaviors was larger in employed than in student populations (Table 3), as  $\rho$  was larger in the  
 406 subsample with employees ( $\rho = .58$ ) than in the student subsample ( $\rho = .42$ ), and the statistic  $Q_{bet}$  was  
 407 statistically significant ( $Q_{bet} = 126.50$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Additionally, moderating effects of the variable  
 408 gender and age were tested by means of meta-regression. Gender did not moderate the relationship  
 409 between CSR and employee-related attitudes and citizenship behaviors ( $\beta = .002$ ,  $Q_{Mod}(1, k = 124) =$   
 410  $2.66$ ,  $p = .10$ ). Age did not moderate the relationship between CSR and employee-related attitudes  
 411 and citizenship behaviors ( $\beta = .005$ ,  $Q_{Mod}(1, k = 84) = 2.29$ ,  $p = .13$ ). Culture did not moderate the  
 412 relationship between CSR and employee-related attitudes and citizenship behaviors  
 413 (individualism/collectivism:  $\beta = -.0002$ ,  $Q_{Mod}(1, k = 112) = 0.07$ ,  $p = .79$ ; masculinity/femininity:  $\beta$   
 414  $= .003$ ,  $Q_{Mod}(1, k = 102) = 2.83$ ,  $p = .09$ ).

#### 415 3.5.2 Study Design Characteristics

416 Study design (predictive vs. concurrent and survey vs. experiment) had a moderating influence on  
 417 the relationship between CSR and employee-related attitudes and citizenship behaviors (Table 3).  
 418 Subsamples using concurrent designs ( $\rho = .58$ ) resulted in a larger mean effect size than subsamples  
 419 using predictive designs ( $\rho = .48$ ). Using survey study designs, larger effect sizes were obtained ( $\rho =$   
 420  $.58$  for survey studies,  $\rho = .35$  for experimental studies), and confidence intervals do not overlap.

421 Status of publication moderated the relationship between CSR and employee-related attitudes and  
 422 citizenship behaviors. Unpublished studies reported larger correlations than published studies (Table  
 423 3). Results of meta-regression showed that the year of publication did not moderate this relationship  
 424 ( $\beta = -.007$ ,  $Q_{Mod}(1, k = 143) = -0.007$ ,  $p = .19$ ). In Fig 4, effect sizes are displayed visually by means  
 425 of a forest plot.

### 426 3.6 Assessment of Publication Bias

427 Publication bias was assessed by means of a trim and fill funnel plot (Duval and Tweedie, 2000b;  
 428 Duval and Tweedie, 2000a) which is presented in Fig 5. Visual examination revealed that there is no  
 429 evidence of the existence of publication bias, as the data points are distributed symmetrically around  
 430 the mean. In summary, the results of this visual examination and subsample analyses (status and year  
 431 of publication) lead to the conclusion that results of this meta-analysis synthesized research on CSR  
 432 and employee-related attitudes and citizenship behavior in a relatively unbiased way.



## 433 4 Discussion

434 This meta-analysis complements existing reviews on CSR (Aguinis and Glavas, 2012; De  
 435 Roeck and Maon, 2018; Glavas, 2016; Rupp and Mallory, 2015) and its relationship with employee-  
 436 related attitudes and citizenship behavior by quantifying these relationships. The meta-analytical  
 437 approach allows empirical generalizations concerning CSR (Geyskens et al., 2009). The results of  
 438 this study, which is the first known meta-analysis focusing on micro-CSR and employee-related  
 439 attitudes and citizenship behaviors, show that the effect sizes of the relationships between CSR and  
 440 employee-related attitudes and citizenship behaviors are large. Following Cohen (Cohen, 1992) and  
 441 in light of Bosco and colleagues' investigation (Bosco et al., 2015), the classification of the effect  
 442 sizes greater than  $\eta^2 = .40$  as large is justified, only the effect size for attractiveness is classified as  
 443 medium. Bosco and colleagues investigated correlational effect size benchmarks based on  
 444 approximately 150,000 correlations (Bosco et al., 2015). According to their analysis, a medium effect  
 445 size of correlated attitudes is  $\eta^2 = .18$  to  $.39$  and a medium effect size of correlated attitudes and  
 446 behaviors  $\eta^2 = .10$  to  $.24$ . Meta-analytical findings in the field of management support this conclusion  
 447 (Paterson et al., 2016). According to an assessment of the magnitude of effect sizes, only 5 - 10% of  
 448 the more than 250 investigated meta-analyses are larger than the overall uncorrected correlations for  
 449 attitudes and behavior we found ( $r = .50$ ,  $r = .41$ , respectively). For the correlation of perceptions and  
 450 attitudes, the researchers report an average corrected effect size of  $\rho = .42$  ( $SD\rho = .12$ ) and for the  
 451 correlation of perceptions and extra-role performance  $\rho = .18$  ( $SD\rho = .04$ ). As the effect sizes we  
 452 obtained mostly exceed these values plus one standard deviation, we conclude that CSR is highly  
 453 relevant to employees. Also in comparison to the field of management in general ( $\rho = .23$ ), and major  
 454 topics in organizational behavior research such as leadership ( $\rho = .35$ ), performance evaluation ( $\rho =$   
 455  $.24$ ) and training ( $\rho = .25$ ), the effect sizes we found are large (Paterson et al., 2016).

456 Concerning theory, we showed that SITO (Ashforth and Mael, 1989) has the potential to  
 457 explain the relationships between CSR and identification, but may be restricted to explain the  
 458 relationships between CSR and all other employee-related attitudes and citizenship behaviors under  
 459 investigation. SITO is based on the fundamental psychological process of social categorization which  
 460 explains why CSR changes employees' attitudes (De Roeck and Delobbe, 2012): The membership in  
 461 the social category of socially responsible companies changes employees' attitudes and behavior. We  
 462 found a stronger relationship between CSR and attitudinal than behavioral outcomes, and this is  
 463 consistent with Ashforth and colleagues' (Ashforth et al., 2008) core idea that attitudes are closer to  
 464 the core identity than behavior. This relation was supported by our data. While attitudes (cognition  
 465 and emotion) are always involved in the process underlying SITO, behavior is not necessarily  
 466 involved (Ashforth et al., 2008). Also following major psychological theories, e.g. on work  
 467 motivation, attitudes precede behavior (Humphrey et al., 2007; Steers et al., 2004). We tested the role  
 468 of identification as a mediator of the relationship between CSR, commitment, job satisfaction and  
 469 OCB. Although the regression coefficients were large and the model fitted the data, identification  
 470 turned out to mediate only the relationship between CSR and commitment. However, the studies we  
 471 investigated are mostly correlational, so we may not draw causal conclusions concerning SITO in  
 472 explaining the relationship of CSR and employee-related attitudes and behavior.

473 Using a meta-analytical method, we were able to compare the correlations of the three foci  
 474 (people, planet and profit) and employee-related attitudes and citizenship behaviors to investigate  
 475 which is most meaningful to employees. We hypothesized that the relationships between the focus of  
 476 CSR and employee-related attitudes and citizenship behaviors are strongest for CSR with a focus on  
 477 people. The category people, consists of people-society (external CSR) and people-employees  
 478 (internal CSR) which indicated the focus of the CSR initiative (initiatives focusing public welfare vs.

479 initiatives specifically addressing employees) (Rupp and Mallory, 2015). Effect sizes were  
 480 significantly larger for the categories people compared to the categories planet, but the effect sizes  
 481 for profit and people are similar in size and confidence intervals overlap. This illustrates that these  
 482 initiatives are highly relevant to employees and probably regarded as most prestigious and distinct  
 483 compared to initiatives focusing on the natural environment. For the category general, which means  
 484 that more than one focus was covered by the CSR initiatives, we obtained the largest effect size. This  
 485 indicates that a combination of several CSR foci and a comprehensive CSR strategy is most effective.  
 486 Overall, SITO provides a theoretical framework for several employee-related attitudes and behaviors,  
 487 but also other theoretical explanations should be integrated in comprehensive theory building in  
 488 micro CSR research. The theoretical frameworks of identification, third-party fairness perception and  
 489 meaningfulness do not exclude one another, but rather complement each other.

#### 490 **4.1 Directions for Future Research and Practice**

491 Concerning implications for research, the processes underlying SITO should be validated in  
 492 the context of CSR. Concerning SITO, in two studies, a mediation by prestige for the relationship  
 493 between perceived CSR and identification has been investigated (Kim et al., 2010; De Roeck and  
 494 Delobbe, 2012) but there is a lack of further studies investigating distinctiveness and salience of the  
 495 out-group.

496 Based on our analysis, we noticed a lack of experimental and longitudinal studies allowing  
 497 for interpretations of causality in CSR research. The number of primary studies included in our meta-  
 498 analysis is not sufficient to draw general conclusions concerning causality across all attitudes and  
 499 behaviors. A closer look on longitudinal studies revealed that most longitudinal studies predict  
 500 employee-related outcomes at Time 2 based on CSR measured at Time 1, but do not contain the  
 501 measurement of CSR and attitudes at both times of measurements (De Roeck et al., 2016; Doh et al.,  
 502 2011; Evans, Davis & Frink, 2011; Gao et al., 2018; Newman et al., 2016; Ng et al., 2018) (De  
 503 Roeck et al., 2016; Evans et al., 2011; Doh et al., 2011; Gao et al., 2018; Newman et al., 2016; Ng et  
 504 al., 2019). Using a three-wave-design and controlling for identification at Time 1, De Roeck and  
 505 colleagues (De Roeck et al., 2016) found a long-term effect of CSR on identification after ten months  
 506 (controlling for identification at Time 1). Two longitudinal studies provide evidence on causal effects  
 507 of CSR: Edwards and Edwards (Edwards and Edwards, 2013) found a change in identification and  
 508 intent to quit over a time period of twelve months. Jones and colleagues (Jones et al., 2014) measured  
 509 only CSR at Time 1, and only attractiveness at Time 2 with a time lag of seven days, but the  
 510 experimental design allows for causal interpretations. A closer look on the (quasi-)experimental  
 511 studies ( $k = 14$ ) revealed that most studies (71%) investigated the effect of CSR on attractiveness  
 512 (Bode et al., 2015; Joo et al., 2016; Zhang and Gowan, 2012), other employee-related attitudes and  
 513 behaviors are rarely investigated (engagement by Ferreira & Real de Oliveira (Ferreira and Real de  
 514 Oliveira, Elizabeth); identification, OCB and job satisfaction by Danel (Danel, 2017) and Müller  
 515 (Müller, 2018); or commitment by e.g., Raub (Raub, 2017)). To sum it up, we encourage future  
 516 research to conduct longitudinal studies (measuring independent and dependent variables at both  
 517 times) and experimental studies on other outcomes than attractiveness to potential employees. In  
 518 doing so, we gain insights concerning the causality of the effect of CSR on employees, which  
 519 promotes examination of existing theories such as SITO and further theory building.

520 Apart from this, the results revealed an open research field and we suggest future researches  
 521 to conduct studies involving multiple perspectives, e.g., using professional CSR rating parallel to  
 522 measuring CSR perceptions on the individual level. In doing so, we will gain insight if CSR ratings  
 523 on the company level are in accordance to individual CSR perceptions. This will also answer further

524 research questions, e.g. if CSR initiatives might be perceived as whitewashing by employees, as  
525 unmet expectations may result in organizational cynicism (Evans et al., 2011; Wilkerson et al.,  
526 2008).

527 Moreover, we propose that future studies report information on the degree of participation of  
528 employees in CSR, a potential moderator (Kim et al., 2010; Bhattacharya et al., 2007). Degrees of  
529 employee participation in CSR range from profound knowledge of CSR programs, to designing them  
530 and to taking part in CSR initiatives. Participation could not be analyzed in this meta-analysis due to  
531 lack of information in the primary studies. We assume that employee participation in CSR is  
532 positively related to the investigated attitudes and citizenship behaviors, which could be explained by  
533 the fact that CSR is more salient to them. Participation can be increased by offering all employees the  
534 opportunity to submit proposals concerning CSR and to encourage them to take part in CSR  
535 initiatives and programs.

536 Regarding the practical value of this meta-analysis, we derive three major implications. First,  
537 companies should promote the communication of corporate social issues to employees. To increase  
538 identification and commitment, the CSR communication strategy should focus on the central working  
539 mechanisms of SITO (Ashforth and Mael, 1989), by emphasizing unique features of their own CSR  
540 initiatives and by comparing them to those of other companies. The perception of CSR is beneficial  
541 to employees, as the results of this meta-analysis show. A mere change of employees' CSR  
542 perceptions, e.g. increased awareness or salience of CSR, will be associated positively with  
543 employee-related attitudes and citizenship behaviors. Companies can use several communication  
544 channels: the intranet, the (employee) newspaper, the notice board, e-mail, staff meetings and social  
545 media.

546 Second, we suggest involving employees in CSR. This will enhance employees' perceived  
547 significance of the job (Raub and Blunschi, 2014), the degree to which the job has an impact on other  
548 people (Hackman and Oldham, 1975). In this way, CSR gives employees the opportunity to  
549 contribute to a higher purpose (Aguinis and Glavas, 2019) and satisfies their need for meaningful  
550 existence (Rupp et al., 2006; Folger et al., 2005). Therefore, employees should be given the  
551 opportunity to design CSR initiatives or at least submit proposals.

552 Third, CSR initiatives seem to achieve the best results regarding employees, if they address  
553 multiple aspects of CSR. We suggest companies to implement wholesome CSR programs and to  
554 focus more than one aspect of CSR by combining people, planet and profit in their CSR strategy. On  
555 closer examination of the two societal foci of CSR (see Table 4), the effect sizes of CSR on the  
556 outcomes under investigation differ in dependence on the CSR focus, which has either a focus on the  
557 employees (people-employee) or on common welfare (people-society). Identification, OCB and  
558 attractiveness are stronger related to employee-focused CSR, however, job satisfaction is stronger  
559 related to people-society. Considering the concept of fairness, we propose the initiatives aiming at  
560 society in general and employees to be balanced, so that CSR is not perceived as unfair towards  
561 employees (Rupp and Mallory, 2015; De Roeck et al., 2014).

## 562 **4.2 Limitations**

563 Due to some small subsamples, some results should be interpreted with caution. Subsample  
564 analyses with imbalanced subsamples (e.g., one subsample consists of a handful of studies, the other  
565 one is ten times as large) can be problematic. The confidence intervals are wider in small subsamples,  
566 which make the results not as reliable as large subsamples and the effect sizes are prone to change if  
567 more data were included. In our study, this concerns the analysis of study design and population

568 characteristics. The subsamples of subject group, study design, and level of CSR measurement were  
 569 imbalanced (Table 3). Please keep this in mind when interpreting the results containing imbalanced  
 570 subsamples. However, the hypothesis-relevant subsamples were not imbalanced.

571 Moreover, studies using self-report measures such as the majority of the studies included in  
 572 this meta-analysis are often discussed to be subject to common-method bias. Spector and colleagues  
 573 (Spector et al., 2019) introduced a new approach to this problem and claim that self-report data are  
 574 not only subject to common method variance which inflates correlations, but are also subject to  
 575 unshared sources (uncommon method variance) which attenuates correlations. This bias is not caused  
 576 by self-report data per se, it is rather an issue of the measure. As in this meta-analysis the constructs  
 577 were measured using several different measures in the primary studies, the issue of inflated or  
 578 attenuated measures might be ruled out.

### 579 4.3 Conclusion

580 This meta-analysis includes 140 articles containing 153 effect sizes of the relationship  
 581 between CSR and employee-related attitudes and citizenship behaviors. It is the first (known) attempt  
 582 of quantitatively synthesizing research findings on the relationships between CSR and organizational  
 583 attitudes and citizenship behaviors and resulted in mostly large mean effect sizes for the relationships  
 584 between CSR and identification, engagement, attractiveness, commitment, job satisfaction and OCB.  
 585 Findings show the benefit of employees being informed about CSR. Future research should  
 586 investigate the working mechanisms of social identity theory, and longitudinal and experimental  
 587 studies should be promoted. Implications emphasize the need for employee communication of CSR  
 588 initiatives. Do good and talk about it – with your employees.

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## 1248 **6 Manuscript Formatting**

### 1249 **6.1 Tables**

1250 Tables should be inserted at the end of the manuscript. Tables must be provided in an editable format  
 1251 e.g., Word, Excel. Tables provided as jpeg/tiff files will **not be accepted**. Please note that very large  
 1252 tables (covering several pages) cannot be included in the final PDF for reasons of space. **These**  
 1253 **tables will be published as [Supplementary Material](#) on the online article page at the time of**  
 1254 **acceptance. The author will be notified during the typesetting of the final article if this is the**  
 1255 **case.**

### 1256 **7 Conflict of Interest**

1257 The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial  
 1258 relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

### 1259 **8 Author Contributions**

1260 Conceptualization: AP, HJPK, GWM; Methodology (coding and second coding included): AP,  
 1261 HJPK; Formal analysis and investigation: AP, HJPK; Writing - original draft preparation: AP;  
 1262 Writing - review and editing: AP, GWM, HJPK; Funding acquisition: no funding acquired/necessary;  
 1263 Resources: AP (literature search); Supervision: HJPK, GWM.

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### 1269 **1 Data Availability Statement**

1270 The datasets generated and analyzed for this study can be found in the online repository osf.io  
 1271 ([https://osf.io/ztdhr/?view\\_only=d40074d69f4b4e0ebab8451953845278](https://osf.io/ztdhr/?view_only=d40074d69f4b4e0ebab8451953845278)).

## 1272 2 Tables

1273 **Table 1. Study and Population Characteristics.**

Study characteristics		Population characteristics	
<i>k</i>	143	Gender (% male)	53.34
<i>N</i>	89,396	[0; 100]	
Sample sizes (range)	47 – 15,184	Mean age	33.94
Publication years	1999-2018	[21; 52]	
Publication	Number of studies	Culture <sup>b</sup>	
published	137	Individualism/	49.49
unpublished	6	Collectivism	
Study design		[14; 91]	
predictive <sup>a</sup>	10	Masculinity/ Fem.	51.09
concurrent	133	[14; 70]	
Study type		Occupation	Number of studies
survey study	129	employee	123
experimental	13	student	11
quasi-experiment	1	Nationality	
Outcomes		USA & Canada	32
identification	37	Asia	47
engagement	11	Europe	40
OCB	31	other	14
commitment	68	unknown	10
job satisfaction	40		
attractiveness	25		

1274 *Note.* *k* = number of effect sizes, *N* = total number of participants, numbers in square brackets  
1275 indicate ranges. <sup>a</sup> mean time lag = 5.69 months <sup>b</sup> Individualism/Collectivism and  
1276 Masculinity/Femininity scores of Hofstede's (2001) Culture Index (values between 1 and 100). High  
1277 scores indicate an individualistic/masculine orientation.

1278 **Table 2. Subsample Analyses for Employee-Related Outcomes and CSR Dimensions.**

	<i>k</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>SD<sub>r</sub></i>	$\rho$	<i>SD<sub>ρ</sub></i>	95% CI	80% CR	<i>Q</i>	<i>I<sup>2</sup></i> (in %)
<b>Outcome Type</b>	<i>(Q<sub>bet</sub> = 121.55***)</i>									
Attitude	130	86,125	.51	.14	.58	.15	.55; .61	.38; .78	2,900.75***	95.55
Behavior	34	15,346	.31	.17	.34	.18	.28; .40	.12; .56	478.08***	93.10
<b>Outcomes: Employee Attitudes and Citizenship Behaviours</b>	<i>(Q<sub>bet</sub> = 1,551.39***)</i>									
Identification	37	10,456	.43	.13	.46	.12	.42; .50	.31; .60	212.13***	83.03
Engagement	11	32,554	.57	.14	.62	.11	.56; .69	.48; .76	648.57***	98.46
OCB	31	10,157	.36	.18	.38	.18	.31; .44	.15; .61	420.83***	92.87
Commitment	68	33,965	.51	.13	.60	.14	.57; .63	.42; .78	918.78***	92.71
Job Satisfaction	40	29,297	.46	.15	.54	.17	.49; .59	.32; .76	993.84***	96.08
Attractiveness	25	12,447	.32	.12	.36	.12	.31; .40	.21; .50	182.57***	86.86
<b>CSR Focus</b>	<i>(Q<sub>bet</sub> = 294.04***)</i>									
People-Society	53	39,636	.45	.11	.54	.16	.49; .58	.33; .74	1,102.10***	95.28
People- Employee	32	11,315	.44	.17	.47	.18	.41; .54	.24; .71	495.18***	93.74
Planet	15	5,270	.37	.15	.37	.15	.29; .45	.18; .56	149.38***	90.63
Profit	17	4,079	.44	.15	.48	.16	.40; .56	.28; .68	142.60***	88.78
General	112	54,991	.54	.17	.58	.17	.55; .61	.36; .79	2,838.69***	96.09

1279 *Note: k* = number of data sets; *N* = total sample size; *r* = mean uncorrected correlation weighted for sample size; *SD<sub>r</sub>* = standard deviation of *r*,  $\rho$  =  
 1280 mean corrected correlation weighted for sample size and corrected for artefacts due to measurement error; *SD<sub>ρ</sub>* = standard deviation of  $\rho$ ; 95% CI =  
 1281 95% Confidence Interval; 80% CR = 80% Credibility Interval; %VE = percentage of variance accounted for by artifacts; *Q* = test of homogeneity of  
 1282 effect sizes; *I<sup>2</sup>* = measure of inconsistency across study findings.

1283 \*\*\* *p* < .001

1284 **Table 3. Subsample Analyses for Study and Population Characteristics.**

	<i>k</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>SD<sub>r</sub></i>	$\rho$	<i>SD<sub>ρ</sub></i>	95% CI	80% CR	Q	<i>I</i> <sup>2</sup> (in %)
<b>Subject Group</b>	(Q <sub>bet</sub> = 126.50***)									
Students	11	1,750	.35	.21	.42	.23	.27; .56	.13; .71	83.92***	88.08
Employees	123	84,358	.51	.15	.58	.16	.55; .61	.37; .79	3,289.96***	96.29
<b>Study Design</b>	(Q <sub>bet</sub> = 82.84***)									
Predictive	10	6,348	.42	.15	.48	.22	.35; .62	.20; .76	282.30***	96.81
Concurrent	133	83,048	.51	.15	.58	.16	.55; .61	.38; .79	3,214.73***	95.89
<b>Study Design</b>	(Q <sub>bet</sub> = 172.18***)									
Survey Study	129	86,986	.51	.15	.58	.16	.55; .61	.38; .78	3287.92***	96.11
Experimental <sup>1</sup>	14	2,410	.29	.22	.35	.24	.21; .48	.04; .65	119.77***	89.15
<b>Status of publication</b>	(Q <sub>bet</sub> = 7.07**)									
Published	137	88,505	.51	.16	.57	.17	.55; .60	.36; .79	3,544.85***	96.16
Unpublished	6	891	.54	.12	.65	.15	.52; .79	.46; .85	27.95***	82.11

1285 *Note:* *k* = number of data sets; *N* = total sample size; *r* = mean uncorrected correlation weighted for sample size; *SD<sub>r</sub>* = standard deviation of *r*,  $\rho$  =  
1286 mean corrected correlation weighted for sample size and corrected for artefacts due to measurement error; *SD<sub>ρ</sub>* = standard deviation of  $\rho$ ; 95% CI =  
1287 95% Confidence Interval; 80% CR = 80% Credibility Interval; %VE = percentage of variance accounted for by artefacts; Q = test of homogeneity  
1288 of effect sizes; *I*<sup>2</sup> = measure of inconsistency across study findings. <sup>1</sup> contains one quasi-experimental study (*N* = 412).  
1289 \*\*\* *p* < .001 \*\* *p* < .01.

1290 **Table 4. Subsample Analyses for Employee-Related Attitudes and Citizenship Behaviors and Focus of CSR Combined.**

	<i>k</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>SD<sub>r</sub></i>	$\rho$	<i>SD<sub>ρ</sub></i>	95% CI	80% CR	Q	<i>I</i> <sup>2</sup> (in %)	
<b>People Society</b>	(Q <sub>bet</sub> = 348.92***)										
Identification	11	3,528	.33	.08	.34	.07	.29; .39	.26; .43	26.71 **	62.56	
Engagement	6	11,357	.41	.07	.49	.06	.44; .54	.42; .57	37.10***	86.52	
OCB	5	953	.32	.20	.38	.24	.16; .60	.07; .68	41.54***	90.37	
Commitment	25	21,166	.47	.09	.58	.12	.53; .63	.42; .73	343.63***	93.02	
Job Satisfaction	16	19,501	.47	.15	.56	.18	.47; .65	.33; .79	687.96***	97.82	
Attractiveness	9	5,677	.34	.10	.40	.08	.34; .45	.30; .49	35.04***	77.17	
<b>People-Employee</b>	(Q <sub>bet</sub> = 148.07***)										
Identification	10	3,287	.37	.12	.39	.10	.32; .46	.27; .52	43.73***	79.42	
Engagement	1										
OCB	7	1,878	.38	.20	.39	.20	.23; .54	.13; .64	89.73***	93.31	
Commitment	19	6,201	.51	.17	.56	.19	.47; .65	.32; .81	339.16***	94.69	
Job Satisfaction	10	3,582	.34	.22	.37	.22	.23; .52	.09; .66	176.89***	94.91	
Attractiveness	4	868	.46	.18	.50	.18	.31; .68	.26; .73	32.37***	90.73	
<b>General</b>	(Q <sub>bet</sub> = 1,777.21***)										
Identification	29	7,889	.46	.12	.48	.11	.44; .53	.35; .62	153.61***	81.77	
Engagement	7	21,843	.65	.09	.67	.08	.62; .73	.58; .77	294.11***	97.96	
OCB	25	8,564	.34	.19	.35	.19	.28; .43	.11; .59	365.96***	93.44	
Commitment	52	15,657	.54	.15	.57	.16	.53; .62	.37; .77	687.17***	92.58	
Job Satisfaction	31	10,630	.46	.15	.51	.17	.44; .57	.29; .72	404.65***	92.59	
Attractiveness	18	7,050	.31	.13	.34	.12	.28; .40	.18; .49	119.82***	85.81	

1291 *Note:* *k* = number of data sets; *N* = total sample size; *r* = mean uncorrected correlation weighted for sample size; *SD<sub>r</sub>* = standard deviation of *r*,  $\rho$  =  
 1292 mean corrected correlation weighted for sample size and corrected for artefacts due to measurement error; *SD<sub>ρ</sub>* = standard deviation of  $\rho$ ; 95% CI =  
 1293 95% Confidence Interval; 80% CR = 80% Credibility Interval; Q = test of homogeneity of effect sizes; *I*<sup>2</sup> = measure of inconsistency across study  
 1294 findings.

1295 \*\* *p* < .01, \*\*\* *p* < .001

1296 **3 Figure Captions**

1297 **Figure 1. Primary study flow chart depicting numbers of excluded and included articles.**

1298 **Figure 2. Forest plot displaying effect sizes in relation to the average effect size.**

1299 Outcomes and CSR dimensions,  $r$  = mean corrected effect size,  $k$  = number of studies.

1300 **Figure 3. Meta-analytical structural equation model for the relationships between CSR,**  
1301 **identification, and commitment, job satisfaction and OCB as employee-related attitudes and**  
1302 **behavior.**

1303 \*\*\*  $p < .001$

1304 **Figure 4. Forest plot displaying moderator effect sizes in relation to the overall effect size.**

1305 study design and population characteristics,  $r$  = mean corrected effect size,  $k$  = number of studies.

1306 **Figure 5. Trim-and-fill funnel plot.**

Manuscript of Study 2  
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# Scrutinizing Social Identity Theory in Corporate Social Responsibility: An Experimental Investigation

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7 **Keywords: corporate social responsibility, social identity theory, organizational identification,**  
8 **job satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior.**

9 **Abstract**

10 Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is widely established by companies that aim to contribute to  
11 society and minimize their negative impact on the environment. In CSR research, employees'  
12 reactions to CSR have extensively been researched. Social identity theory is often used as a  
13 theoretical background to explain the relationship between corporate social responsibility and  
14 employee-related outcomes, but until now, a sound empirical examination is lacking, and causality  
15 remains unclear. CSR can unfold its effect mainly because of three theoretically important aspects of  
16 CSR initiatives, which increase identification, i.e. distinctiveness, prestige, and salience of the out-  
17 group. This study examines how far identification can explain the effect of CSR on employees. In an  
18 experimental vignette study ( $N = 136$  employees), CSR was manipulated in three degrees (positive,  
19 neutral, negative) to examine its effects on job satisfaction, organizational commitment and  
20 organizational citizenship behaviour. In the vignettes, information on distinctiveness, prestige and  
21 salience of the out-group were presented. Regression analyses showed that CSR significantly  
22 predicted commitment and job satisfaction, but not organizational citizenship behaviour. We found  
23 mediation effects of CSR on commitment, job satisfaction, and organizational citizenship behaviour  
24 through identification, but the effect of CSR on identification explained only little variance which  
25 indicates additional underlying mechanisms. The applicability of social identity theory for explaining  
26 CSR is discussed. Moreover, we discuss further explaining mechanisms.

## 27 1 Introduction

28 Imagine Mary and John, both working in textile companies. Mary is working for a company that  
29 reduces its negative impact on the environment. From flyers and posters at work and local  
30 newspapers, Mary knows much about the company's volunteer programs, which cover regional  
31 projects, but also include educational programs in the production countries. Mary supports ethical  
32 production – she knows that the company pays all workers abroad fairly and that they work under  
33 safe conditions. John also reads about his company in the newspapers, but his company is blamed for  
34 irresponsible behavior. He is convinced that his company's main strategy is to make more and more  
35 profit by saving unnecessary costs, often with negative environmental side effects and promoting  
36 social inequality. While Mary is satisfied with her company's strategy, John is questioning the  
37 business practice of his employer, thinking about accidents in the production countries and the  
38 devastating environmental impact. Whose identification with their job and company is stronger?

39 Nowadays, employees become increasingly aware of the actions and policies that companies  
40 undertake to support local communities and common welfare (Raub and Blunschi, 2014), which is  
41 termed corporate social responsibility (CSR). CSR describes 'context-specific organizational actions  
42 and policies that take into account stakeholders' expectations and the triple bottom line of economic,  
43 social, and environmental performance' (Aguinis, 2011, 855). For a long time, CSR research focused  
44 on the financial advantages and increase in reputation associated with CSR, before individual  
45 reactions gained wide attention (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). CSR can either be internal, which means  
46 that it focuses on internal stakeholder groups of CSR such as employees, or external, which means  
47 that it is focused on stakeholder groups outside of the company, such as customers or the natural  
48 environment and society in general (Rupp and Mallory, 2015; Glavas, 2016). CSR initiatives cover  
49 diversity policies and practices, ethical labor practices, employee training, philanthropic giving,  
50 community development programs, volunteerism initiatives and environmental sustainability  
51 programs (Rupp and Mallory, 2015). The relationships between CSR and employees' attitudes and  
52 behavior are well researched, and CSR has proven to affect job satisfaction, organizational  
53 commitment and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) in a positive way (Glavas, 2016; Gond et  
54 al., 2017; Rupp and Mallory, 2015). To sum it up, the society in general, the company itself and the  
55 employees may benefit from CSR. This study focuses on employees because from a company  
56 perspective, they are the most important stakeholder regarding CSR and they are often planning,  
57 witnessing and participating in CSR (Rupp and Mallory, 2015).

58 Despite numerous studies investigating the benefits of CSR for employees such as increased  
59 commitment and job satisfaction (Gond et al., 2017; Rupp and Mallory, 2015), less attention has  
60 been paid to the mechanisms how these positive effects on employees occur. Experimental research  
61 on mediating mechanisms of CSR effects on employees is lacking (Glavas, 2016; Gond et al., 2017)  
62 and little is known about what exactly leads employees to be more satisfied with their job or be more  
63 committed to their employer when the company is socially responsible. This can only be achieved  
64 using experimental research designs allowing for causal interpretations. The present study sheds light  
65 on this black box. Social identity theory is the most frequently used theoretical framework to explain  
66 how CSR affects employees in a favorable way (Gond et al., 2017), but this theory has not  
67 sufficiently been investigated experimentally yet. Especially research is lacking which incorporates  
68 all theoretical assumptions stemming from social identity theory in the organization (Ashforth and  
69 Mael, 1989). The aim of this study is to investigate organizational identification as an explanatory  
70 mechanism in the context of CSR and employees' attitudes and behavior using an experimental  
71 design, following the strong demands for experimental research on CSR (Aguinis and Glavas, 2012).  
72 We use social identity theory in organizations as a theoretical ground and contribute to the literature

73 by illuminating causal relationships of CSR on organizational commitment, job satisfaction and  
 74 OCB. This thorough theory application allows us to discuss the applicability of organizational  
 75 identification for explaining how CSR affects employees. Using experimental vignette methodology,  
 76 both internal and external validity is enhanced (Aguinis and Bradley, 2014). Based on the knowledge  
 77 of the underlying mechanisms, we learn about how organizations should communicate CSR  
 78 initiatives internally to employees so that the postulated positive effects of CSR can unfold.

## 79 **1.1 CSR and its Relationship with Employee-related Outcomes**

80 Analyzing CSR on the individual level is termed micro-CSR and includes investigating the effects of  
 81 CSR on employees or other individuals. It is well known that employees' perception of CSR is  
 82 highly positively related to many beneficial outcomes, such as identification, commitment, job  
 83 satisfaction, OCB, engagement and intentions to stay (for reviews, see e.g., Aguinis and Glavas,  
 84 2012; Glavas, 2016; Gond et al., 2017; Rupp and Mallory, 2015).

85 Several studies, except the vignette study by Raub (2017; study 2) investigated the relationship  
 86 between CSR and commitment, which describes 'an emotional attachment to, identification with and  
 87 involvement in the organization' (Meyer and Allen, 1991, 67), in a correlational design (Farooq et  
 88 al., 2014; Turker, 2009). Organizational commitment involves affective, normative and continuous  
 89 components, while the affective component is most researched. In spite of identification being part of  
 90 the definition of commitment, identification and commitment are distinct concepts, because  
 91 employees integrate the organization's values into their self-concept when they identify with their  
 92 organization, which is not the case for commitment (Ashforth et al., 2008; Riketta, 2005). When  
 93 employees witness their companies engaging in social and environmental causes, they perceive that  
 94 the company has high ethical values and, in consequence, they are more likely to feel committed to  
 95 the company they are working for (Kim et al., 2010).

96 Job satisfaction – a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or  
 97 job experiences (Locke, 1976) – was also often investigated as an outcome of CSR, but to our  
 98 knowledge only in cross-sectional research designs (Shin et al., 2016; Valentine and Fleischman,  
 99 2007). Job satisfaction depends on how employees evaluate their job situation (Shin et al., 2016; van  
 100 Dick et al., 2004), which also includes the perception of CSR initiatives. A positive evaluation of  
 101 CSR initiatives can increase job satisfaction.

102 CSR is associated with an increase in OCB, which is defined as 'individual behavior that is  
 103 discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and in the aggregate  
 104 promotes the efficient and effective functioning of the organization.' (Organ, 1988, p. 4), e.g.,  
 105 helping an over-strained colleague. When employees perceive that their company acts in line with  
 106 their ethical values, they are inclined to behave according to these values as part of this company  
 107 (Ellemers et al., 1999). They are likely to show positive behavior such as OCB, because the company  
 108 serves as a good example and sets a behavioral guideline in terms of citizenship behavior (Lin et al.,  
 109 2010). However, to our knowledge, this association was only investigated in cross-sectional research  
 110 designs (Gao and He, 2017; van Dick et al., 2019).

111 Although the relationships between CSR and commitment, job satisfaction and OCB have been  
 112 investigated numerous times using correlational research designs, we do not know if CSR actually  
 113 has a causal *effect* on these employee-related attitudes and behavior (Aguinis and Glavas, 2012; Jones  
 114 and Rupp, 2017).

115 Building on an experimental research design, we derive the following hypothesis:

116 Hypothesis 1: Positive information about CSR including distinctiveness, prestige and salience  
 117 compared to negative or neutral information (including distinctiveness, prestige and salience) leads to  
 118 a) increased commitment, b) increased job satisfaction and c) increased OCB.

## 119 1.2 Organizational Identification

120 It remains unclear what exactly causes the effects of CSR on employees; there is no consensus  
 121 among researchers regarding theory and mediating mechanisms (Rupp and Mallory, 2015; Gond et  
 122 al., 2017), and theories lack strict experimental examination. The aim of this study is to examine how  
 123 far identification can explain the effect of CSR on employees, as social identity theory is the most  
 124 widespread and most important theory in individual-level CSR research (De Roeck et al., 2016; Gond  
 125 et al., 2017). Although organizational identification is widely assumed as an explaining mechanism  
 126 and identification has been investigated as a mediator several times (e.g., Farooq et al., 2014; Farooq  
 127 et al., 2017; Shin et al., 2016), the aspects of social identity theory leading to organizational  
 128 identification have been overlooked so that we do not know for certain if the mechanisms underlying  
 129 social identity theory can be transferred to micro CSR.

130 Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel and Turner, 1979) is a profound theory originally  
 131 stemming from early research in social psychology. Concerning CSR, this means that employees  
 132 perceiving CSR increase their identification with their company, which increases their commitment,  
 133 job satisfaction and OCB (e.g., Farooq et al., 2014; Farooq et al., 2017; Shin et al., 2016). There is  
 134 growing research interest in the construct of organizational identification, because identification  
 135 transforms the relationship of employees to their employers and results in an increased work  
 136 performance (for an overview, see Blader et al., 2017), health and well-being (Jetten et al., 2017).

137 The basic principles underlying social identity theory are (self-) categorizing processes. People  
 138 categorize themselves and others as in-group and out-group members according to social attributes,  
 139 such as gender, age, profession, or the quality of CSR initiatives. These categorizations create a  
 140 feeling of belongingness. Even a mere (random) categorization into a group can create a feeling of  
 141 belongingness as shown in studies using minimal group paradigm (Otten and Moskowitz, 2000;  
 142 Tajfel et al., 1971). Working for a socially responsible company is a favorable social attribute and  
 143 people strive for ethical companies as employers because positively valued group memberships  
 144 enhance self-esteem (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Organizational identification increases and, in turn,  
 145 has favorable effects on further outcomes such as job satisfaction (Shin et al., 2016), commitment  
 146 (Farooq et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2010) and OCB (Farooq et al., 2017). Perceiving internal CSR is  
 147 associated with pride to be a member of the company, which in turn is linked to increased  
 148 identification (Lythreitis et al., 2019).

149 According to Ashforth and Mael (1989), who applied social identity theory to the organizational  
 150 context, three antecedents increase the tendency to identify with an organization: distinctiveness,  
 151 prestige and salience of the outgroup (Ashforth et al., 2008). *Distinctiveness* is described as the  
 152 uniqueness of a group and differentiates one group from another (Oakes and Turner, 1986). In the  
 153 context of CSR, people are likely to identify with their company when the CSR initiatives are unique  
 154 and stand out from other companies' initiatives (Du et al., 2007). *Prestige* refers to the desire of  
 155 people to identify themselves cognitively with winners (Ashforth and Mael, 1989) which enhances  
 156 their self-esteem. Prestigious companies enjoy a good reputation because their CSR initiatives won  
 157 awards or are reported in the media. *Salience* means how easily a group category or group  
 158 membership comes into mind (Fitzsimmons, 2013). The awareness of other groups (salience of the  
 159 out-group) increases the awareness of the in-group (Allen et al., 1983; Ashforth and Mael, 1989).  
 160 Transferred to the context of CSR, salience describes the employees' awareness of the CSR

161 initiatives of other companies. In summary, employees are likely to benefit from CSR when they  
 162 identify with the company they work for, which happens when its CSR initiatives are unique, when  
 163 they are prestigious and enjoy a good reputation, and when employees are aware of the CSR  
 164 initiatives and strategies of other companies. Some researchers tested single aspects of the social  
 165 identity theory as mediators in the context of CSR, such as prestige (De Roeck and Delobbe, 2012;  
 166 Farooq et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2010). For example, De Roeck and colleagues investigated prestige as  
 167 mediator in a three-wave longitudinal design (2016). However, these three antecedents —  
 168 distinctiveness, prestige and salience of the out-group — have never been investigated  
 169 simultaneously. Only incorporating all three aspects allows us to rigorously examine how far  
 170 organizational identification explains the effect of CSR on employees.

171 Based on social identity theory, researchers have investigated how CSR affects commitment, job  
 172 satisfaction and OCB, which are among the most important employee-related consequences of CSR  
 173 (Glavas, 2016). For the relationship between CSR and commitment, identification has been tested as  
 174 a mediator next to trust in a cross-sectional design (Farooq et al., 2014). Identification was a stronger  
 175 mediator than trust. According to social identity theory, positive CSR perceptions enhance  
 176 organizational identification. This leads to the desire to maintain this positive identity and group  
 177 membership, which translates into commitment. From this strong feeling of belongingness,  
 178 employees derive satisfaction because it enhances their self-esteem (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Using  
 179 a two-wave longitudinal design, El Akremi and colleagues (2018) found that the relationship between  
 180 CSR and job satisfaction was mediated by identification. Shin and colleagues (2016) investigated a  
 181 sequential mediation model of CSR on job performance, sequentially mediated by identification and  
 182 job satisfaction. Using a cross-sectional design, they found that when employees perceive that their  
 183 organization engages in CSR, they are more likely to identify with their organization, which, in turn,  
 184 translates into job satisfaction. For the relationship between CSR and OCB, research also indicates  
 185 that identification has an important mediating role (Farooq et al., 2017; Shen and Benson, 2014).

186 Although identification has been tested as a mediator, experiments and research incorporating the  
 187 three aspects that enhance organizational identification in parallel – distinctiveness, prestige and  
 188 salience (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Ashforth et al., 2008) – are lacking. Testing identification as a  
 189 mediator of the effect of CSR on employee-related attitudes and behavior is not sufficient to support  
 190 social identity theory; rather, a closer look on the antecedents which are necessary for the formation  
 191 of identification is needed. To test social identity theory in the context of CSR, and thereby assuming  
 192 distinctiveness, prestige and salience as critical to the formation of identification, we formulate the  
 193 following hypothesis:

194 Hypothesis 2: The effect of CSR on a) job satisfaction, b) commitment and c) OCB is mediated by  
 195 organizational identification.

## 196 **2 Materials and Methods**

### 197 **2.1 Research Design and Procedure**

198 In an experimental vignette study, CSR was manipulated in a within-subjects design to measure its  
 199 effects on the dependent variables commitment, job satisfaction and OCB. Vignettes are descriptions  
 200 of situations aiming at manipulating different levels of independent variables (Aguinis and Bradley,  
 201 2014). The experimental vignette methodology can enhance both internal and external validity at the  
 202 same time compared to usual experiments (Aguinis and Bradley, 2014) which face the dilemma of  
 203 sacrificing external for internal validity (Scandura and Williams, 2000). Moreover, by presenting  
 204 authentic scenarios, experimental realism is promoted, and independent variables can be

205 manipulated. Therefore, the method allows for causal interpretation of hypothesized effects (Aguinis  
 206 and Bradley, 2014). Experimental vignettes are widely used in e.g., leadership (Marchiondo et al.,  
 207 2015; Nübold et al., 2013; Steffens et al., 2018) organizational justice (Ötting and Maier, 2018;  
 208 Trinkner et al., 2019), and work design (Thompson et al., 2014; Zacher et al., 2017) studies.

209 In three experimental conditions, the vignettes contained either positive, neutral or negative  
 210 portrayals of CSR activities of a fictitious company serving as the manipulation of the independent  
 211 variable. The CSR initiatives described in the vignettes were fictitious and designed based on social  
 212 identity theory, by putting emphasis on the aspects that increase organizational identification  
 213 according to Ashforth and Mael's application of CSR on organizations (1989). This means that the  
 214 initiatives were described as more or less distinct and prestigious, and contained information on other  
 215 companies' CSR or not. This adds value to the literature, as former vignette studies in the field of  
 216 CSR used were not designed based on theoretical frameworks (Evans and Davis, 2011; Jones et al.,  
 217 2014; Kim and Park, 2011; Rupp et al., 2013; Tsai and Yang, 2010, Zhang and Gowan, 2012). Each  
 218 vignette contained the same introduction with general information on the described CSR initiative.  
 219 As the study was conducted in Germany, the text was presented in German, but is translated here  
 220 (text in brackets indicates the structure and was not presented to the participants):

221 "You work for the company Elvoria GmbH [Ltd.] in the purchasing department. The company  
 222 produces various products that are available in most hardware stores. Currently, employees have  
 223 the opportunity to participate in a project focusing on social responsibility. All employees have  
 224 been informed via e-mail and can apply for this voluntarily. You applied and are now part of the  
 225 project team. The project team meets regularly to discuss ideas, topics and implementation of  
 226 projects that add value to society."

227 In the positive condition, CSR initiatives were described as unique and generous in order to put  
 228 emphasis on distinctiveness. *Prestige* was realized by describing the company as a winner of a highly  
 229 prestigious national CSR award and to manipulate salience of the out-group, another nearby and  
 230 same-branch company's CSR initiatives were described:

231 "[Distinctiveness] The company management initiated the project in order to get involved in  
 232 social issues, because the company regards employees and society as two important pillars. The  
 233 project members have already decided on special and innovative projects and are currently testing  
 234 them. For example, early school leavers are to be given a chance at the company by offering  
 235 longer-term, paid internships that offer the prospect of a career start. In addition, more  
 236 environmentally friendly resources are to be used for production.[Prestige] Last year, the  
 237 company was awarded the CSR Prize of the German Federal Government, a prize for special  
 238 projects that demonstrate economic, ecological and social responsibility. In addition, various  
 239 national media reported positively on the project.[Salience of the out-group] Flexirea is the  
 240 biggest competitor of Elvoria GmbH and offers its employees a similar project of this kind. At  
 241 Flexirea there is already disagreement between the project group and the management. The  
 242 project work is not part of the working time here. In your company, Elvoria GmbH, sufficient  
 243 capacity is freed up so that no additional work is required."

244 In the neutral condition, *distinctiveness* was realized by describing the CSR initiatives as average,  
 245 and a medium level of prestige was realized by describing the company as nominated for a local  
 246 unknown CSR award. Information on other companies' CSR initiatives was given, but information  
 247 on the location and branch was omitted so that they were perceived salient, but less salient than in the  
 248 positive condition:

249 “[Distinctiveness] The company management initiated the project in order to get more socially  
 250 involved, because they hope that this will increase the company's performance. The project  
 251 members have already decided on some project ideas and are currently planning them. The first  
 252 projects are already being implemented. For example, a project on the paperless office was  
 253 initiated to reduce paper consumption in the company. In addition, resources are to be  
 254 purchased and processed that barely meet the statutory environmental guidelines. [Prestige]  
 255 Last year, the company was nominated for a regional award for innovative projects and  
 256 finished in one of the bottom places. A colleague tells you that he has heard about the project  
 257 but cannot give any further information. [Salience of the out-group] The company Flexirea  
 258 offers its employees a similar project of this kind. Both companies have the same goal: to  
 259 increase the company's performance. Every quarter there is a meeting for exchange between the  
 260 two project groups to support each other. For example, the paperless office initiative is also  
 261 implemented at Flexirea.”

262 In the negative condition, in order not to be perceived as distinct and unique, the company's CSR  
 263 initiatives were described as self-serving. To realize a lack of *prestige*, the company was described to  
 264 be awarded with the Public Eye Award, an award given for purely profit-oriented globalization,  
 265 indicating negative reputation. No information on other companies was given so that other companies  
 266 were not perceived salient at all; instead, further general information on the CSR initiatives were  
 267 given to ensure that all vignettes had the same word count.

268 “[Distinctiveness] The company management initiated the project in order to gain a better  
 269 reputation in the media, because recently, due to a serious accident in the company, profits  
 270 dropped sharply. The project members have already decided on simple, easy and not very original  
 271 projects and are in the process of testing them. For example, unpaid internships are to be offered  
 272 to school drop-outs, which will later be converted into temporary employment contracts. In  
 273 addition, more cost-effective resources that are supposedly environmentally friendly are to be  
 274 used. [Prestige] Last year, the company was awarded the Public Eye Award, an award for the  
 275 most serious cases of human rights violations and environmental misconduct by companies. In  
 276 addition, various national media reported negatively on the project. [Salience of the out-group]  
 277 The project is scheduled for another two years and additional project members may join and  
 278 leave over time. The application is open to all employees and they can apply at any time. A  
 279 project membership runs for six months to give other employees a chance to be part of the  
 280 project.”

281 Each vignette in the original German version counted 245 words to keep the manipulation degree  
 282 constant in the three conditions. The vignettes were pretested in a sample of  $N = 26$  students to  
 283 ensure that the three aspects increasing organizational identification were manipulated as intended  
 284 and the scenarios were perceived as realistic. For this purpose, participants reported how realistic  
 285 they perceived the scenarios and filled in a manipulation check (see below). Based on the results, the  
 286 neutral vignette was slightly adapted to achieve a more neutral level of CSR.

287 At the beginning of the experiment, participants were informed about the study and randomly  
 288 assigned to one of the three conditions. Forty-six participants were assigned to the positive condition,  
 289 46 to the neutral and 44 participants to the negative condition. Next, one of the vignettes was  
 290 presented and the participants were instructed to imagine they were working for the described  
 291 company. To facilitate the participants' imagination, the company was given a fictitious name and a  
 292 logo was designed. In the following, participants filled in a questionnaire to assess the dependent

293 variables, a manipulation check and demographics. A university's ethics committee approved the  
294 research design (file reference 1266).

## 295 2.2 Measures

296 For all outcomes, the following instruction was given: 'Please think about the described situation and  
297 imagine vividly you were in this situation right now. Rate the following statements as if you were an  
298 employee of this company. Please rate the probability of your agreement to the statements (1 = *very*  
299 *unlikely* and 5 = *very likely*, as well as 1 = *very unlikely* and 7 = *very likely*, respectively).' The  
300 sequence of the scales measuring the dependent variables was randomized.

301 Organizational identification, hypothesized as a mediating variable, was measured with six items by  
302 Mael and Ashforth (1992), used in the German translation (Kraus and Woschée, 2009). Responses  
303 were given on a five-point Likert scale ( $\alpha = .80$ ). A sample item is 'When someone criticizes this  
304 company, it feels like a personal insult'.

305 Affective commitment was measured using the German adaptation (Maier and Woschée, 2002) of the  
306 Organizational Commitment Questionnaire by Porter and Smith (1970). Fourteen items were  
307 responded on a seven-point Likert scale ( $\alpha = .94$ ). One item was omitted due to a strong conceptual  
308 overlap with the organizational identification scale. A sample item is 'I talk up this organization to  
309 my friends as a great organization to work for'.

310 Job satisfaction was measured using a German short adaptation (Haarhaus, 2016) of the Job  
311 Descriptive Index by Smith and colleagues (1969). Only the subscales satisfaction with tasks,  
312 satisfaction with development opportunities, satisfaction with leadership and general job satisfaction  
313 were used as the others were not appropriate with regard to the scenario described in the vignettes,  
314 e.g. the satisfaction with the colleagues. Twenty items were responded on a five-point Likert scale ( $\alpha$   
315 = .95). A sample item is 'My tasks are exciting'.

316 Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) was measured using the German translation (Staufenbiel  
317 and Hartz, 2000) of the OCB scale by Organ (1988). Twenty-five items were responded on a seven-  
318 point Likert scale ( $\alpha = .84$ ). A sample item is 'I make constructive suggestions that can improve the  
319 operation of the company'.

320 For the manipulation check, participants had to indicate their perceptions of the distinctiveness,  
321 prestige and salience of the out-group of the CSR initiatives described in the vignettes. Participants  
322 responded four items on five-point Likert scales ( $\alpha = .77$ ). The following items were used: 'The  
323 company is innovative and unique' for distinctiveness, 'It seems that the described company has a  
324 low social status' for prestige (reverse-coded), 'An exchange between the described company and  
325 other companies is taking place' for salience of the out-group as well as 'The already launched CSR  
326 initiatives are significant contributions to the good of society' for an overall rating of CSR.

## 327 2.3 Participants

328 The sample consisted of  $N = 136$  German employees who were recruited online. The online  
329 experiment was completed by 155 participants, but five had to be excluded because of too many  
330 missing values. Fourteen participants were excluded based on a speed index (Leiner, 2013). They  
331 completed the survey three times as fast (under 4min 20s) as the average respondent did ( $Mdn =$   
332 14min 27s), so they could not have been able to read the vignette and items carefully (Breitsohl and  
333 Steidelmüller, 2018).



334 The final sample consisted of employees in the age between 21 and 63 years ( $M = 33.5$ ,  $SD = 11.7$ ),  
 335 working 33.7 hours a week on average ( $SD = 9.7$ ,  $Min = 15$ ,  $Max = 50$ ). Fifty-six percent of the  
 336 participants were female. Concerning education, 61% reported to have a university degree, and  
 337 49.3% had completed or were currently absolving a vocational education (multiple selection was  
 338 allowed). Half of the participants were working in small and medium-sized enterprises (49.3%) with  
 339 less than 250 employees, the other half worked in larger companies. Thirty-five percent of the  
 340 participants reported that they had no experience with CSR (34.6%), 32.4% reported somewhat  
 341 experience, 25.7% actively dealt with the subject of CSR and 7.4% reported much experience or  
 342 active participation in CSR.

### 343 **3 Results**

344 The descriptive statistics and inter-correlations of the variables under investigation are displayed in  
 345 Table 1. No unexpected correlations were noticeable.

#### 346 **3.1 Manipulation Check**

347 Results of the manipulation check indicate that CSR was successfully manipulated. First, we  
 348 compared the means in the three conditions (Table 2). The distinctiveness of the CSR programs of  
 349 the described company was perceived significantly different in the three conditions by the  
 350 participants ( $F(2, 133) = 38.10$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .36$ ), as well as its prestige ( $F(2, 133) = 37.08$ ,  $p <$   
 351  $.001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .36$ ) and the salience of the out-group ( $F(2, 136) = 18.13$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .22$ ). In addition,  
 352 the general CSR rating differed in the three conditions ( $F(2, 133) = 24.41$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .27$ ).  
 353 Analysis of the means showed that the effects were shaped in the intended direction. As the  
 354 hypotheses were tested using the macro PROCESS (Hayes, 2018) for the statistical software SPSS,  
 355 and PROCESS does not include a coding system that allowed us to compare all three groups equally,  
 356 we used ANOVA for the manipulation check.

357 Second, we tested if the variables of the manipulation check mediate the relationship between CSR  
 358 and identification. A statistically significant mediation indicates that the manipulation was  
 359 successful. We found confirming results for this assumption: the indirect effect was .246. The  
 360 confidence interval did not include zero (95%  $CI = [.069; .437]$ ).

#### 361 **3.2 Hypothesis Testing**

362 To test the hypotheses, we used regression analysis with contrast coding of the independent variable  
 363 (Cohen et al., 2013). This coding method allows generating contrasts, which exactly represent the  
 364 stated hypotheses. In our experiment, the three conditions, each representing either positive, neutral  
 365 or negative CSR, were contrast coded and represented by two contrast variables. The first contrast  
 366 (C1) tested the positive condition against the negative and neutral conditions simultaneously, and the  
 367 second contrast (C2) tested the neutral condition against the negative.

368 Contrast coding of a variable with three levels requires the generation of two contrasts (Cohen et al.,  
 369 2013). Yet, to answer our hypothesis, we needed to interpret only the first contrast. For the sake of  
 370 completeness, we will briefly report the results of C2 – the comparison of the neutral and negative  
 371 condition.

372 To test the hypotheses, we computed a mediation analysis using the macro PROCESS for SPSS by  
 373 Hayes (2018) with a categorical independent variable (PROCESS version 3.1, SPSS version 25). The  
 374 option Helmert coding allowed us to test the above-mentioned contrasts and we used model 4 to test

375 mediation. The first contrast C1 follows the logic of comparing one group simultaneously to two  
 376 other groups. The paths from CSR to the three independent variables job satisfaction (H1a),  
 377 commitment (H1b) and OCB (H1c) in the mediation model, labelled as total effect, tested hypotheses  
 378 1a-c. In Tables 3-5, results are displayed. Interpreting C1, results showed that positive CSR  
 379 information leads to significantly more job satisfaction and commitment as compared to negative and  
 380 neutral CSR information, but has no effect on OCB. Hypotheses 1a (commitment) and 1b (job  
 381 satisfaction) can be supported, hypothesis 1c) has to be rejected (OCB). Moreover, we found that  
 382 concerning C2, neutral CSR information leads to more job satisfaction and commitment than  
 383 negative CSR information, but not OCB.

384 Concerning the mediation analyses, all paths of the mediations are displayed in summary in Tables 3-  
 385 5. To test Hypotheses 2a-c, we rely on the confidence intervals of the relative indirect effects, which  
 386 are the product of the effect of CSR on identification and the effect of identification on the outcome.  
 387 We used PROCESS with 5,000 bootstrap samples to compute 95% confidence intervals for the  
 388 relative indirect effects. If the confidence intervals do not include zero, the relative indirect effect is  
 389 statistically significant and indicates mediation. Regarding C1, the effects of CSR on commitment,  
 390 job satisfaction and OCB, each mediated by identification, the confidence intervals for the indirect  
 391 effects did not include zero, which means that the effects of CSR on commitment (H2a), job  
 392 satisfaction (H2b) and OCB (H2c) were each mediated by identification (Table 3). In the case of  
 393 OCB, the total effect of CSR on OCB and the direct effect of CSR and identification on OCB were  
 394 not significant, but we found a significant indirect effect, indicating an 'indirect-only mediation'  
 395 (Zhao et al., 2010). In sum, the data support Hypotheses 2a-c. Moreover, concerning C2, we found  
 396 no mediating effects of identification for the effect of CSR on the three outcomes commitment (Table  
 397 2), job satisfaction (Table 4) and OCB (Table 5). Noteworthy is that CSR explained only 4% of the  
 398 variance when predicting identification.

#### 399 4 Discussion

400 In the workplace, employees not only perceive how their company treats their employees, but they  
 401 also observe the quality of their company's relationships to other stakeholders. It has long been  
 402 assumed that employees' CSR perceptions have resulted in an increased identification with their  
 403 company, which would lead to positive attitudes and behavior relevant in the workplace such as  
 404 commitment, job satisfaction and citizenship behavior. Research on CSR on individual-level CSR  
 405 was dominated by correlational studies. Identification was assumed to explain why employees react  
 406 to CSR, but has not been sufficiently investigated. We investigated the role of organizational  
 407 identification as an explaining mechanism for the effects of CSR on employees using an  
 408 experimental vignette design. The results show that there is a direct influence of CSR perceptions on  
 409 commitment and job satisfaction, but not on OCB. Organizational identification mediates the  
 410 relationships between CSR and the dependent variables commitment, job satisfaction and OCB. This  
 411 means that employees perceiving positive CSR in their company should identify more with their  
 412 company. We interpret the results that employees not only consider themselves as members of their  
 413 company, but also incorporate their working place into their self-concepts (Sluss and Ashforth,  
 414 2008). This strong feeling of belongingness manifests in a feeling of commitment towards their  
 415 company. Moreover, employees are satisfied with their job, because the values of their company are  
 416 also rooted in their own self-concepts. Strong organizational identification also evokes organizational  
 417 citizenship behavior. Employees behave in line with the values of the company.

418 Despite no total effect of CSR on OCB, the relationship between CSR and OCB is mediated by  
 419 identification. We explain the reason why there is no total effect with the concept of identity

420 (Ashforth et al., 2008). It indicates that behavior is a more distal aspect of a person's identity than  
 421 their attitudes. Ashforth and colleagues (2008) distinguish the core, content and behaviors of identity.  
 422 Employees cannot only think and feel their way into identification, but also act their way into  
 423 identification. Whereas the core of identity underlies a narrow definition of identity and contains self-  
 424 definitions, importance as well as affect, the content and behaviors of identity are broader concepts  
 425 and conceptually more distant from the core of identity. The content of identity includes values,  
 426 goals, beliefs, stereotypic traits and knowledge, skills and abilities. Commitment and job satisfaction  
 427 fall in this category. Behaviors of identity are most distant from the core of identity; OCB falls in this  
 428 category. Based on the distance between the core of identity and behaviors of identity, the authors  
 429 regard behavior not as a 'necessary component' of identity, but as a 'probabilistic outcome of  
 430 identification' (Ashforth et al., 2008, p. 311). As we found direct relationships between CSR and  
 431 attitudinal outcomes such as commitment and job satisfaction, it is possible that CSR cannot directly  
 432 evoke behaviors of identity such as OCB due to the distance to the core of identity. This is in line  
 433 with the results of Evans, Davis and Frink (2011). They investigated the relationships between  
 434 perceived corporate citizenship (PCC – in other words, CSR) as the independent variable, and  
 435 identification and OCB as dependent variables. They found a positive significant relationship  
 436 between PCC and identification. The relationship between PCC and OCB was only positive and  
 437 significant for those people who are highly other-regarding value oriented which means that they are  
 438 not concerned only about themselves but also about others. In their study, they also did not find a  
 439 direct relationship between CSR and OCB, and in their study, the relationship between CSR and  
 440 OCB was only revealed when other aspects were considered. Other researchers also came to this  
 441 conclusion: Identification transmitted the relationship between CSR and OCB only when the  
 442 employees' importance of and values towards CSR as a moderating factor was taken into account  
 443 (van Dick et al., 2019).

444 Although our findings, specifically the tests of our hypothesis, provide evidence for organizational  
 445 identification as an explaining mechanism for the effects of CSR on employees, the low variance  
 446 explanation is attracting attention: CSR only explains 4% of the variance while predicting  
 447 identification. Therefore, we cannot promote identification as the most important mediating  
 448 mechanism with clear conscience any longer. The number of studies relying on social identity theory  
 449 in the context of CSR does not indicate that it is the most important explanation of why CSR affects  
 450 employees. Instead, we demand the consideration of other mediators or more complex mediation  
 451 models combining several mediating mechanisms in the future. In the following, we summarize the  
 452 most prominent and often-cited theories in the following, which should be investigated in future  
 453 research. A conjoint investigation will guide theory formation in the field of micro CSR. Examples of  
 454 other theory formation in the context of CSR are the concept of organizational justice, signaling  
 455 theory, or meaningfulness (for an extensive review, see Rupp and Mallory, 2015).

456 From an organizational justice point of view, researchers argue that employee perceptions of the  
 457 presence of CSR in their company can be regarded as third-party observations of organizational  
 458 justice to the extent that the company acts fairly towards other stakeholders (Rupp, 2011).  
 459 Consequently, employees infer that they will also be treated fairly in this company, which increases  
 460 their satisfaction and commitment as well as increases OCB. Signaling theory (Rynes, 1991) relies on  
 461 a similar principle: The presence of CSR serves as a positive signal so that employees and job  
 462 applicants expect benefits for themselves from the organizations' engagement in CSR, comparable to  
 463 the halo effect (Nisbett and Wilson, 1977). In the context of CSR, this theory was investigated in an  
 464 experimental setting as well as in a field study (Jones et al., 2014). Others argue that the perception  
 465 of CSR produces meaningfulness (Aguinis and Glavas, 2019; Seivwright and Unsworth, 2016). CSR  
 466 initiatives make work meaningful, because employees – indirectly and in some case even directly –

467 contribute to a better society. Their personal values can unfold at work, which increases their  
 468 satisfaction. They also want to give something back, which can possibly manifest in helping behavior  
 469 towards their colleagues or OCB.

470 Finally, we promote further theory formation, integration and strict experimental theory testing on  
 471 the question why CSR affects employees. This is especially important if theories are being  
 472 transferred from other contexts. Up to now, theories do not make any statements about the negative  
 473 effects of a low amount of CSR initiatives. This is illustrated by our findings concerning the  
 474 comparison of neutral and negative CSR perceptions regarding their effects on commitment and  
 475 OCB. Neutral CSR perceptions are associated with an increase in commitment and job satisfaction as  
 476 compared to negative CSR perceptions. However, these effects are not mediated by identification, so  
 477 that organizational identification seems to be appropriate as an explaining mechanism for only  
 478 positive CSR perceptions. Participants could have perceived the CSR initiatives that are depicted in  
 479 the negative vignette as corporate social irresponsibility (CSiR). However, research on CSiR is  
 480 scarce, but Jones, Bowd and Tench theorize about CSiR and CSR as a continuum or a linear  
 481 relationship (2009). CSiR is the antithesis to CSR and accounts for the fact that companies may act  
 482 irresponsibly under certain circumstances although they usually attach importance to CSR and act in  
 483 a socially responsible way most of the time. CSiR is defined as ‘corporate actions that result in  
 484 (potential) disadvantages and/or harm to other actors’ (Lin-Hi and Müller, 2013, p. 1932). CSiR may  
 485 involve breach of law and can have disastrous consequences for the operating company (Lin-Hi and  
 486 Müller, 2013; Jones et al., 2009). The concept helps companies to identify weaknesses and address  
 487 those (Jones et al., 2009). Our vignettes do not likely depict CSiR, as the negative condition was not  
 488 rated extremely bad concerning CSR ( $M = 2.84$ ,  $SD = 1.12$  on a 5-point scale;  $N = 44$ ). Lin-Hi and  
 489 Müller (2013) distinguish ‘doing good’ and ‘avoiding bad’ and assume that doing good is more  
 490 effective than avoiding bad. Our results point in the same directions. However, we cannot conclude if  
 491 the positive effect of CSR is stronger than the negative effect of CSiR because of the  
 492 operationalization of the negative vignette. To sum it up, theory formation and investigation  
 493 incorporating CSiR is a crucial point for future research, especially if the same psychological  
 494 explaining mechanisms apply to CSiR as to CSR.

#### 495 **4.1 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

496 Although our study can make several contributions to the literature, there are, however, some  
 497 limitations. Vignette methodology studies are often criticized for the threats to external validity  
 498 (Scandura and William, 2000). However, by presenting realistic scenarios, experimental realism can  
 499 be increased (Aguinis and Bradley, 2014). We reached this goal by a pretest of the vignettes and the  
 500 manipulation check proves that manipulation of CSR was successful, so we can assume that the  
 501 participants could put themselves in one of the three described situations and imagine it vividly.  
 502 Vignette methodology is commonly used in e.g., leadership (Marchiondo et al., 2015; Nübold et al.,  
 503 2013; Steffens et al., 2018) organizational justice (Ötting and Maier, 2018; Trinkner et al., 2019), and  
 504 work design research (Thompson et al., 2014; Zacher et al., 2017). In addition, the method enabled us  
 505 to design the vignettes strictly according to the social identity theory and to incorporate information  
 506 about distinctiveness, prestige and salience, which has never been investigated before. Nevertheless,  
 507 we would encourage researches to investigate the effects of CSR on employees by means of  
 508 intervention studies.

509 By using intervention studies, the communication strategy of CSR initiatives to employees can be  
 510 manipulated according to different theoretical frameworks to subsequently measure the outcomes.  
 511 We describe an example of an intervention study in the following. In experimental intervention

512 studies researchers measure the effects of an intervention and compare them to other interventions  
 513 and/or a control group. A study that compares two interventions on CSR communication, would  
 514 involve at least two companies. In one company, an article about CSR in the company newsletter can  
 515 be written in a way that targets identification (by focusing on distinctiveness and prestige) whereas in  
 516 another company the article could be written in a way that focuses third-party justice perceptions to  
 517 measure its effects on employee-related attitudes and behavior. In this way, we can learn how  
 518 employees react to CSR and compare identification and justice as explaining mechanisms.

519 Furthermore, generalizability is often a problem of experimental designs. However, the combination  
 520 of realistic scenarios described in the vignettes and a population that consists of employed persons  
 521 counteracts this threat.

## 522 **4.2 Recommendations for Practice**

523 All theories on CSR and employee-related outcomes on the micro level have in common that it  
 524 depends on which CSR activities and policies the employees perceive, and not what the company  
 525 actually and objectively does in terms of CSR (Rupp and Mallory, 2015). This also has to be  
 526 considered when designing CSR initiatives. Employees will value no CSR initiative positively if they  
 527 do not even know about it, so that communication becomes an important success factor of CSR (Du  
 528 et al., 2010). We recommend companies not only to community their CSR report on their website,  
 529 but also to focus on internal CSR communication by informing employees about CSR initiatives. As  
 530 our study revealed a causal relationship, this will increase the employees' job satisfaction and  
 531 commitment. Internal communication can be achieved by a regular company e-mail newsletter, a  
 532 printed newspaper, posters, and brochures, just to name a few. By including photos or info graphs the  
 533 employees get a better picture of their company's CSR. A participative leadership style can also be  
 534 favorable for perceptions of internal CSR (Lythreatis et al., 2019).

535 Moreover, the communication strategy could be designed according to the most effective explaining  
 536 mechanism. Concerning identification, this would include incorporating "we-language" and phrases  
 537 such as "moving the world together" (Hyundai Motor Group, n.d.) to create a sense of belongingness.  
 538 However, more research is needed concerning the most effective psychological mechanism.

## 539 **4.3 Conclusion**

540 Our results show that employees react to CSR and that CSR affects their attitudes such as  
 541 commitment and job satisfaction. We examined how far organizational identification can explain the  
 542 effects of CSR on employees. Using an experimental vignette methodology design, we investigated  
 543 causality and found that CSR has a rather strong causal influence on commitment and job  
 544 satisfaction. Although identification mediated the effect of CSR on commitment, job satisfaction and  
 545 OCB, CSR explained only little variance of identification. This strongly indicates that there are  
 546 further explaining mechanisms that should be considered. We would encourage research to  
 547 investigate other theories in experimental settings and to include CSiR in future research. All in all,  
 548 next to the widely investigated financial and reputation-related importance of CSR to companies in  
 549 general, this research stresses the importance of CSR to employees.

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## 760 **6 Data Availability Statement**

761 The datasets generated for and analyzed in this study can be uploaded in the online repository at  
 762 osf.io upon publication.

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766 **8 Tables**

767 Table 1

768 *Summary of Intercorrelations, Means and Standard Deviations for the Variables under Investigation*

769

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 CSR	—	—	—								
2 Gender	—	—	.03	—							
3 Age	33.45	11.75	-.12	-.10	—						
4 Work Hours/Week	33.73	9.68	.06	-.19	.27**	—					
5 CSR Experience	2.06	0.95	.11	.06	-.12	-.10	—				
6 Identification	3.44	0.76	.20*	.09	.01	.02	-.06	<i>.80</i>			
7 Commitment	4.54	1.21	.62***	.18*	-.01	-.06	.11	.36***	<i>.94</i>		
8 Job Satisfaction	3.62	0.73	.55***	.18*	-.02	-.04	.09	.34***	.81***	<i>.95</i>	
9 OCB	4.75	0.56	.04	.25**	.22*	.02	.07	.47***	.24**	.31***	<i>.84</i>

770

771 *Note.* *N* = 136. \* *p* < .05, \*\* *p* < .01. Values in *Italic* in diagonal are reliability coefficients. CSR was  
 772 coded 1 = negative, 2 = neutral, 3 = positive. Gender was coded 1 = male, 2 = female.

773 Table 2  
 774 *Means and Standard Deviations for the Items of the Manipulation Check*  
 775

	Distinctiveness			Prestige		Salience		General CSR	
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Positive	46	3.93	.71	4.39	.77	3.28	.81	4.28	.75
Neutral	46	3.35	.97	3.37	1.14	3.91	.95	3.87	1.11
Negative	44	2.32	.96	2.36	1.37	2.77	.89	2.84	1.12

776  
 777

778 Table 3  
 779 *Mediation Analyses of the Effects of Information about CSR (C1) on Commitment, Mediated by*  
 780 *Identification*  
 781

Commitment		Consequent									
		Y Commitment			M Identification			Y Commitment			
Antecedent		<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	
X CSR	C1	1.27	.17	.000	0.29	.14	.032	1.15	.17	.000	
	C2	1.14	.20	.000	0.14	.16	.387	1.08	.19	.000	
M Identification		—	—	—	—	—	—	0.40	.10	.000	
Constant		-4.52	.08	.000	-3.44	.06	.000	-3.16	.37	.000	
		$R^2 = .39$			$R^2 = .04$			$R^2 = .45$			
		$F(2,133) = 43.19, p < .001$			$F(2,133) = 2.69, p = .071$			$F(3,132) = 36.49, p < .001$			
Indirect effect	C1								95% <i>CI</i> = [.009; .283]		
	C2								95% <i>CI</i> = [-.068; .216]		

782  
 783 *Note.*  $N = 136$ . DV = dependent variable. *B* = unstandardized coefficient. *CI* = confidence interval.  
 784 The contrast C1 tests the positive conditions against the neutral and negative conditions  
 785 simultaneously, contrast C2 tests the neutral condition against the negative condition.

786 Table 4  
 787 *Mediation Analyses of the Effects of Information about CSR (C1) on Job Satisfaction, Mediated by*  
 788 *Identification*  
 789

Job Satisfaction		Consequent									
		Y Job Satisfaction			M Identification			Y Job Satisfaction			
Antecedent		<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	
X CSR	C1	0.67	.11	.000	0.29	.14	.032	0.60	.11	.000	
	C2	0.60	.13	.000	0.14	.16	.387	0.57	.12	.000	
M Identification		—	—	—	—	—	—	0.24	.07	.000	
Constant		3.61	.05	.000	-3.44	.06	.000	-2.79	.24	.000	
		$R^2 = .30$			$R^2 = .04$			$R^2 = .36$			
		$F(2,133) = 28.95, p < .001$			$F(2,133) = 2.69, p = .071$			$F(3,132) = 25.01, p < .001$			
Indirect effect	C1								95% <i>CI</i> = [.003; .180]		
	C2								95% <i>CI</i> = [-.045; .129]		

790  
 791 *Note.*  $N = 136$ . DV = dependent variable. *B* = unstandardized coefficient. *CI* = confidence interval.  
 792 The contrast C1 tests the positive conditions against the neutral and negative conditions  
 793 simultaneously, contrast C2 tests the neutral condition against the negative condition.

794 Table 5  
 795 *Mediation Analyses of the Effects of Information about CSR (C1) on OCB, Mediated by Identification*  
 796

Antecedent	OCB	Consequent									
		Y OCB			M Identification			Y OCB			
		<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	
X CSR	C1	0.06	.10	.547	0.29	.14	.032	-0.04	.09	.637	
	C2	-0.03	.12	.826	0.14	.16	.387	-0.01	.16	.476	
M Identification		—	—	—	—	—	—	-0.36	.06	.000	
Constant		-4.75	.05	.000	-3.44	.06	.000	-3.52	.20	.000	
		$R^2 = .00$			$R^2 = .04$			$R^2 = .23$			
		$F(2,133) = 0.21, p = .812$			$F(2,133) = 2.69, p = .071$			$F(3,132) = 13.08, p < .001$			
Indirect effect	C1								95% <i>CI</i> = [.009; .249]		
	C2								95% <i>CI</i> = [-.069; .162]		

797  
 798 *Note.*  $N = 136$ . DV = dependent variable. *B* = unstandardized coefficient. *CI* = confidence interval.  
 799 The contrast C1 tests the positive conditions against the neutral and negative conditions  
 800 simultaneously, contrast C2 tests the neutral condition against the negative condition.



Manuscript of Study 3  
(pre peer review version)

Paruzel, A., Müller, A.T., Dukart, N., & Maier, G.W. *Identification, justice or meaningfulness? An experimental investigation of the psychological mechanisms responsible for the effect of corporate social responsibility on employees.* [Manuscript submitted for publication]

Datasets: [https://osf.io/mf6xp/?view\\_only=a73aee4f89b346fb8f5ccb7c0c35d515](https://osf.io/mf6xp/?view_only=a73aee4f89b346fb8f5ccb7c0c35d515)

# **Identification, Justice or Meaningfulness? An Experimental Investigation of the Psychological Mechanisms Responsible for the Effect of Corporate Social Responsibility on Employees**

The impact of corporate social responsibility (CSR) on employees has been extensively researched and psychological mechanisms (such as organizational identification, organizational justice, and meaningfulness) have been proposed. However, mediators are mostly examined individually, and experimental research allowing for causal interpretations is lacking. In this experimental vignette study, we manipulated CSR in three degrees (positive, neutral, negative) to measure its effects on commitment, job satisfaction and organizational citizenship behavior ( $N = 189$  employees) and tested three mediators stemming from pertinent theoretical approaches: organizational identification, organizational justice, and meaningfulness. Our findings show that identification mediated the effect of CSR on commitment, justice on all dependent variables and meaningfulness on commitment and job satisfaction. An exact replication yielded the same pattern of results ( $N = 131$  employees). Variance explanation and comparison of indirect effects indicate that justice is the strongest mediator. This theory testing yielded surprisingly different results when compared to the numerous studies that use social identity theory as theoretical framework. Hence, it is time to critically reconsider established theoretical assumptions concerning the role of social identity theory in CSR research. In future theorizing in CSR research, organizational justice should be assigned a central role.

*Keywords:* corporate social responsibility, identification, justice, meaningfulness, commitment, job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behavior, experiment, vignette

Data are available at: [https://osf.io/mf6xp/?view\\_only=a73aee4f89b346fb8f5ccb7c0c35d515](https://osf.io/mf6xp/?view_only=a73aee4f89b346fb8f5ccb7c0c35d515)

Education programs, volunteerism initiatives, environmental protection, community development programs, and family-friendly policies – all represent corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives (Rupp & Mallory, 2015). CSR can be defined as an integration of social, environmental, ethical, consumer and human rights concerns into a company's business strategies. CSR is not only relevant to the management who aims to display their corporate culture in their CSR, but it is also relevant to a company's customers or applicants who rely on a corporate image and reputation when deciding to buy a product or to send in their application (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). CSR is especially relevant to employees who perceive, design, or participate in their company's CSR initiatives (De Roeck & Maon, 2018; Rupp & Mallory, 2015; Seivwright & Unsworth, 2016). In the last decade, the significance of CSR to employees has been extensively investigated and the importance of CSR to employees in the scientific community is undisputed (Glavas, 2016; Gond et al., 2017; De Roeck & Maon, 2018).

Despite the great importance of CSR for employees and the numerous studies that have focused on it, there are still gaps in our knowledge of the topic. For example, a wide variety of theoretical assumptions concerning the psychological mechanisms causing a positive effect of CSR on employees (e.g., Raub & Blunschi, 2014; Tziner et al., 2011), existing in parallel, have been proposed (Gond et al., 2017). These assumptions have been tested using correlational designs, and more rarely longitudinal designs (e.g., Edwards & Edwards, 2013; Newman et al., 2016). However, there is still a notable lack of research allowing for causal interpretations, which is essential for theory building and development.

Our study makes the following contributions. First, it adds theoretical value to the literature on CSR, because we investigate the three most important psychological processes (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019; De Roeck & Maon, 2018) and test them in parallel to learn which is

most effective. Second, we investigate whether the effect of CSR on commitment, job satisfaction, and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) is causal by applying an experimental design. Only studies that allow for causal interpretations can be used to determine how the CSR effect on employees occurs. The knowledge about causality will assure that CSR in fact has an impact on employees and other influencing factors can be excluded. Applying an experimental design, we can determine if employees are satisfied, committed and show citizenship behavior due to CSR and not because their job is interesting (Sousa-Poza & Sousa-Poza, 2000), their organization supports them (Meyer et al., 2002), or they are conscientious (Organ & Ryan, 1995), which are typical predictors of job satisfaction, commitment, and OCB. As pointed out by Gond et al. (2017), knowledge about the psychological mechanism is critical to better understand the effect of CSR on employees and to develop theory. Knowledge about psychological mechanisms is also highly important for practice, because effective CSR can only be designed according to the psychological mechanisms that are most effective. Third, we replicate our findings in a second sample, thereby reacting to the replication crisis. This follows the discovery that a shocking amount of results in psychological and human behavior research do not replicate. Reproducible science can be achieved by replicating findings (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2016; Munafò et al., 2017; Shrout et al., 2018) which is the “gold-standard” of research (Kepes & McDaniel, 2013).

### **Corporate Social Responsibility and Its Effect on Employees**

Several studies have found that CSR, which is defined as caring for the well-being of others and the natural environment by simultaneously creating value for the business (Glavas & Kelley, 2014) is associated with positive employee-related attitudes and behavior (e.g., Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Glavas, 2016; Gond et al., 2017; De Roeck & Maon, 2018; Rupp & Mallory,

2015). For example, research shows that CSR is associated with increased affective commitment, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) and job satisfaction (Glavas, 2016; Rupp & Mallory, 2015). These constructs are also positively related with outcomes on the company level such as performance or retention (e.g., Das & Baruah, 2013; Indarti et al., 2017; Judge et al., 2001; Riketta, 2008).

We investigate three different psychological mechanisms to produce the positive effect of CSR on employees and to find which is most important (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019; De Roeck & Maon, 2018), as follows: organizational identification, organizational justice, and meaningfulness of work. This means that the employees will be committed to their company, they will be more satisfied, and they will show more citizenship behavior when their company is socially engaged because they either identify strongly with their company, feel treated especially fairly, or their work becomes more meaningful through CSR. Although all of the theoretical approaches have been examined individually, their interplay has not yet been extensively studied. However, there are attempts to integrate identification and justice in theoretical approaches (e.g., De Roeck et al., 2014; De Roeck & Maon, 2018; Ghosh, 2018).

### ***Social Identification***

Social identity theory in organizations (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Haslam & Ellemers, 2005) originally stems from a social psychological theory on the formation of groups and feelings of belongingness (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Ashforth and Mael (1989) adapted this theory to individual and group behavior at work, theorizing about how individuals develop an organizational identity. Identification at work, which is the perception of oneness or belongingness, increases when the employees perceive distinctiveness, prestige and when an out-group (e.g., other companies) is salient. Applied to CSR, this means that employees are more

likely to identify with their organization if its CSR initiatives are distinct, prestigious, and if the employees are aware of other companies' CSR initiatives (Kim et al., 2010; Rupp & Mallory, 2015). Kim et al. (2010) found that CSR perceptions are associated with organizational identification. Van Dick et al. (2019) investigated identification as a mediator between CSR and work engagement, as well as OCB; however, the relationship was only positive when the importance of CSR was taken into account. In CSR research, several researchers have found that identification mediated the relationships between CSR and commitment (Farooq et al., 2014; Im et al., 2017), CSR and job satisfaction (Agarwal et al., 2018; Im et al., 2017; Shin et al., 2016) and CSR and OCB (Gao & He, 2017; Newman et al., 2016). Using an experimental design, Paruzel et al. (2020) found that identification mediated the effect of CSR on commitment, job satisfaction, and OCB, but CSR explained only 4% of variance in identification, which is in contrast to the findings from correlational research. Given that most studies are correlational, we apply an experimental design and formulate the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1:* The effect of CSR on a) commitment, b) job satisfaction and c) OCB is mediated by organizational identification.

### ***Organizational Justice***

Organizational justice theory also explains how CSR might affect employees. When a company is socially engaged, the employees observe third parties (i.e., the beneficiaries of the CSR initiatives) being treated fairly. Hence, CSR serves as a source of justice judgments for the employees (Rupp et al., 2006). Based on these third-party justice observations, the employees assume that they will also be treated fairly by their company (Rupp, 2011). The assumption of being treated fairly after perceiving third-party justice through CSR perceptions is associated with increased commitment (Asif et al., 2017), job satisfaction (Tziner et al., 2011) and OCB

(Farid et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2019). Because these are mostly correlational studies, we apply an experimental design and formulate the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 2:* The effect of CSR on a) commitment, b) job satisfaction and c) OCB is mediated by organizational justice.

### ***Meaningfulness***

Meaningfulness through work is another theoretical approach to explain how CSR affects employees. CSR enables employees to find purpose and meaningfulness through work by contributing to the common good (Rosso et al., 2010). Because companies engaging in CSR contribute to the welfare of society or protect the natural environment, their employees perceive their work as meaningful by contributing to these higher objectives pursued with CSR (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019). The employees regard CSR as a means of achieving meaningfulness that might be lacking in their job (Seivwright & Unsworth, 2016). When employees perceive that their company is socially responsible, they will think that they will (indirectly) have a positive impact on other people and the natural environment by working for a socially engaged organization (Raub & Blunschi, 2014). Perceiving meaningfulness at work was found to transmit the relationship of CSR and affective commitment (Kim et al., 2018), job satisfaction (Raub & Blunschi, 2014) and OCB (Raub & Blunschi, 2014; Supanti & Butcher, 2019). Because experimental studies are lacking, we formulate the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 3:* The effect of CSR on a) commitment, b) job satisfaction and c) OCB is mediated by meaningfulness.

### ***Comparison of Mediators***

To advance theory, it is important to know which explaining mechanism is the strongest to predict how CSR affects employee-related outcomes. Social identity theory, and the fairness

and the meaningfulness approaches provide potential explanations for why CSR affects employees, but only by comparing them will we find if they are equal in their explanation of the effect of CSR on employees, or if there is one strong explaining mechanism while the others are rather weak. However, the literature does not allow reliable assumptions concerning the relative strength of the mediators because the explaining mechanisms were mostly examined individually (Im et al., 2017; Asif et al., 2017; Paruzel et al., 2020; Raub & Blunschi, 2014) or were not compared (De Roeck et al., 2014). Before more complex theoretical assumptions are tested, such as causal chains as proposed by De Roeck and Maon (2018), it is important to compare explaining mechanisms stemming from pertinent theoretical approaches to determine how strong the explaining mechanisms are. In a recent experimental study, CSR explained only little variance in identification, which questions the role of identification and indicates that alternative psychological mechanisms may be stronger (Paruzel et al., 2020). Future theory developments should be centered on the strongest explaining mechanism. Therefore, we formulate the following hypothesis to determine if employees react to CSR because CSR fosters their identification with their company, they assume to be treated fairly, or because their work becomes more meaningful through CSR:

*Hypothesis 4:* The organizational identification, organizational justice and meaningfulness mediators differ in their strength of explaining the effect of CSR on commitment, job satisfaction, and OCB.

## **Material and Methods**

### **Design**

We use an experimental design and vignette methodology to manipulate CSR, which allows us to measure its effects on the dependent variables of commitment, job satisfaction, and



OCB. Organizational identification, organizational justice and meaningfulness were investigated as mediators. We used a between-subjects design. Testing mediation requires an experimental design, as mediation is defined as a transfer of causality from the independent variable to the dependent variable via the mediator (Eden et al., 2015; Stone-Romero & Rosopa, 2008).

Vignettes portray fictitious situations to manipulate different levels of independent variables (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014). Compared to the usual experiments, which face the dilemma of sacrificing external for internal validity (Scandura & Williams, 2000), the experimental vignette methodology can enhance both internal and external validity at the same time (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014). Moreover, experimental realism can be raised by presenting authentic scenarios. Independent variables can be manipulated, which allows for causal interpretation of hypothesized effects (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014). In the CSR context, experimental vignette studies have been used to investigate the effect of CSR on applicant attraction (e.g., Catano & Morrow-Hines, 2016; Evans & Davis, 2011; Zhang & Gowan, 2012). They are also widely used in a number of research fields such as leadership (Nübold et al., 2013; Steffens et al., 2018) organizational justice (Ötting & Maier, 2018; Trinkner et al., 2019), and work design (Mlekus et al., 2019; Zacher et al., 2017) studies.

In three experimental conditions, the vignettes contained either positive, neutral or negative portrayals of CSR activities of a fictitious company serving as the manipulation of the independent variable. Each vignette contained the same introduction with general information on the company and its CSR strategy. The study participants were instructed to imagine that they are working for a company that aims for social engagement. For this purpose, the company has formed a project team to develop ideas and initiatives. The participants were instructed to imagine that they were part of this team.

In the positive condition, the project is described as a contribution to society and that social engagement is at the company's core. Moreover, early school leavers are offered a paid internship with a chance to start a career and environmentally-friendly resources are used in the production process. For the work in the project team, tasks have been reorganized so that team members have enough time besides their everyday work.

In the negative condition, the company's goal to initiate the project team is described as a means of improve its reputation in the media which has been damaged due to a severe accident. Moreover, early school leavers are offered unpaid internships, which will be changed to short-term low paid loan work after the internship is over, and cheap and supposedly environmentally friendly resources are used in the production process.

Participants in the neutral condition, read that the company's goal to initiate the project team is to increase company performance. Moreover, CSR comprises a paperless office to minimize waste and the use of resources in the production process meets legal environmental guidelines.

Each vignette had the same length (198 words) to keep the manipulation degree constant in the three conditions. The CSR activities described in the vignettes represent typical examples of CSR (El Akremi et al., 2018; Rupp & Mallory, 2015; Turker, 2009), which is also examined using a manipulation check.

At the beginning of the experiment, the participants were informed about the study and they were randomly assigned to one of the three conditions. Next, one of the vignettes was presented and the participants were instructed to imagine that they were working for the described company. To facilitate the participants' imagination, the company was given a fictitious name. In the following, the participants filled in a questionnaire to assess the mediating

and dependent variables, they were also given a manipulation check and demographic information was gathered. A university's ethics committee approved the research design.

To substantiate our findings, we conducted an exact replication (Kepes & McDaniel, 2013) of this study in a second sample. This enabled us to gain trustworthiness in our results and replication helps us to “determine whether an observed effect is ‘true’” (Kepes & McDaniel, 2013, p. 261).

## **Sample**

### ***Data Collection***

The main study was conducted as an online study in Germany in 2018. The data for the replication were also collected in Germany in 2019. Participants were recruited in social networks such as Xing and by snowball sampling. A priori power analysis using G\*Power (version 3.1.9.4) based on data from a previous study on the effect of CSR on commitment, job satisfaction and OCB yielded a required sample size of  $N = 177$  to detect a medium effect ( $f = .30$ ). Employees had to work at least 17 hours per week to be included in the study. The participants were offered voluntary participation in a voucher raffle (10€ voucher, which can be redeemed with 200 providers).

**Main Study.** Of 775 participants who clicked on the survey link, 209 participated in and finished the study. However, 13 participants had to be excluded because they did not give their consent to participate in the study, did not work at least 17 hours per week ( $N = 2$ ), or rushed through the questionnaire ( $N = 5$ ). According to Breitsohl and Steidelmüller (2018), the quality of online studies (which are susceptible to careless responding) can be increased by excluding participants who probably did not read the items and responded properly, so we applied the speed index (Leiner, 2019). At an average processing time of 14 minutes and 6 seconds, the five

participants, who rushed through the survey, completed the survey in under 3 minutes and 30 seconds. Sixty-three participants were assigned to the positive condition, 64 to the neutral and 62 participants to the negative condition.

**Replication Study.** To analyze the appropriate sample size for the replication study, we conducted post hoc power analyzes using G\*Power (version 3.1.9.4) based on the main study, which indicated excellent power. The data of the main study indicated that a sample size of  $N = 129$  would have been sufficient to detect the effects that we found in the main study ( $f = .35$  for the smallest effects), so we aimed for a sample size of approximately  $N = 129$  for the replication study.

In total, 143 people participated in and finished the study. However, 12 participants had to be excluded because they did not work at least 17 hours per week. No one was excluded after applying the speed index (Leiner, 2013; Breitsohl & Steidelmüller, 2018). The average processing time was 14 minutes and 28 seconds. Forty-six participants were assigned to the positive condition, 41 to the neutral and 44 to the negative condition.

### *Sample Characteristics*

**Main Study.** The final sample of the main study consisted of 189 participants. 119 women and 67 men participated in the study, one diverse participant and two did not report their gender. The mean age was 34.85 ( $SD = 12.71$ ). On average, the participants worked 34 hours per week ( $SD = 10.01$ ). Most participants had worked for at least five years at their company (47.6%), a third had worked for one to five years (33.7%) and 18.7% had worked for less than one year at their company. A quarter of the participants worked in the health and social services sector (27%), followed by accounting, law, and administration (18%); commercial services, sales, and tourism (17.5%); arts and humanities (12.7%); and other sectors (24.7%). Concerning

education, most participants have a university degree (Bachelor's: 29.6%, Master's: 38.1%, PhD: 3.7%), 20.6% had a high-school diploma and 5.8% report middle school as their highest education level.

**Replication Study.** The final sample of the replication study consisted of 131 participants, of which 82 were women and 49 men. The mean age was 31.38 ( $SD = 10.02$ ). Most participants had worked in the service (34.4%), or health and social services sector (33.6%), or other sectors (32%). Concerning education, most participants have a university degree (62.2%), 28.2% have a high-school diploma, 9.9% vocational training and 5.3% have no education (checking multiple options was allowed).

### **Measures**

Because the study participants imagined a fictitious scenario that served as the manipulation of CSR, they were explicitly instructed not to rate their actual job; rather, they were instructed to imagine the situation described in the vignettes vividly and to rate the statements of the following questionnaires as if they were working for the company described in the vignette. The mediators of organizational identification, organizational justice and meaningfulness were presented in randomized order and the order of the dependent variables of affective commitment, job satisfaction and OCB was also randomized.

#### ***Organizational Identification***

Organizational identification was measured with a six-item scale developed by Mael and Ashforth (1992; German translation by Kraus and Woschée, 2012). A sample item is 'When someone praises this company, it feels like a personal compliment'. The participants responded to the items on a seven-point Likert scale, indicating agreement ( $1 = I \text{ strongly disagree}$  to  $7 = I \text{ strongly agree}$ ; main study  $\alpha = .75$ , replication study  $\alpha = .76$ ).

***Organizational Justice***

Organizational justice was measured with a German six-item scale that was developed by Jiranek et al. (2015). A sample item is ‘All in all, I am treated fairly in this company’. The participants responded to the items on a five-point Likert scale (1 = *I strongly disagree* to 5 = *I strongly agree*; main study  $\alpha = .91$ , replication study  $\alpha = .94$ ).

***Meaningfulness***

Meaningfulness was measured with a four-item subscale (task significance) from the Work Design Questionnaire that was developed by Morgeson and Humphrey (2006; German translation by Stegmann et al., 2010). A sample item is ‘The job itself is very significant and important in the broader scheme of things’. The participants responded to the items on a five-point Likert scale (1 = *I strongly disagree* to 5 = *I strongly agree*; main study  $\alpha = .80$ , replication study  $\alpha = .86$ ).

***Organizational Commitment***

Affective commitment was measured with a scale that was developed by Porter and Smith (1970; German translation by Maier & Woschée, 2002). A sample items is ‘I am willing to commit myself more than necessary to contribute to the success of the company’. The participants responded to the items on a five-point Likert scale (1 = *I strongly disagree* to 5 = *I strongly agree*;  $\alpha = .93$  in both studies). Of the 15 items of the original scale, one item was omitted due to a conceptual overlap with the organizational identification scale (‘I am proud when I can tell others that I belong to this company.’).

***Job Satisfaction***

Job satisfaction was measured with a scale comprising 15 items developed by Haarhaus (2016). A sample items is ‘All in all, my job is satisfying’. The participants responded to the

items on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = *I strongly disagree* to 7 = *I strongly agree*;  $\alpha = .95$  in both studies).

### ***Organizational Citizenship Behavior***

OCB was measured with a scale comprising 25 items (replication: 13 items) developed by Staufenbiel and Hartz (2000). A sample item is 'I help others when they are overloaded with work'. The participants responded to the items on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = *I strongly disagree* to 7 = *I strongly agree*; main study  $\alpha = .88$ , replication study  $\alpha = .87$ ).

### ***Corporate Social Responsibility (Manipulation Check)***

To test if the manipulation of CSR was successful, we used a three-item scale measuring CSR beliefs (Wagner et al., 2009; own translation according to translation procedures by Douglas & Craig, 2007). A sample item is 'In my opinion, this company is concerned to improve the well-being of society'. The participants responded to the items on a five-point Likert scale (1 = *I strongly disagree* to 5 = *I strongly agree*; main study  $\alpha = .92$ , replication study  $\alpha = .93$ ).

## **Results**

### **Manipulation Check and Descriptive Statistics**

The results of the manipulation check indicated that manipulation of CSR was successful. First, we compared the means in the three conditions and performed an ANOVA. The CSR rating differed in the three conditions ( $F(2, 184) = 61.92, p < .001, \eta^2 = .40$ ). Analysis of the means showed that the effects were shaped in the intended direction.

Second, we tested if the variables of the manipulation check mediate the relationship between CSR and the mediators. For all mediation analyses, we used the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2018). A statistically significant mediation indicates that the manipulation was

successful. Our results confirm this assumption for all mediators, because the confidence intervals did not include zero: for identification, the indirect effect was  $-.28$  (95%  $CI = [-.15; .42]$  for C1) and  $.18$  (95%  $CI = [.09; .29]$  for C2); for justice, the indirect effect was  $.40$  (95%  $CI = [.29; .52]$  for C1) and  $.26$  (95%  $CI = [.17; .36]$  for C2); and for meaningfulness, the indirect effect was  $.29$  (95%  $CI = [.17; .42]$  for C1) and  $.19$  (95%  $CI = [.11; .29]$  for C2).

The correlations are presented in Table 1. All correlations showed the intended direction. Table 2 displays means and standard deviations of the variables under investigation per condition.

### **Hypotheses Testing**

To test if the effects of CSR on commitment, job satisfaction and OCB each were mediated by identification, justice, and meaningfulness, we conducted separate mediation analyzes for each outcome, testing all mediators simultaneously in parallel. We examined the indirect effects to test the mediation hypotheses (Tables 3 - 5). The results showed that organizational identification mediated the effect of CSR on commitment (H1a) but not on job satisfaction (H1b) and OCB (H1c). Organizational justice mediated the effects of CSR on commitment (H2a), job satisfaction (H2b), and OCB (H2c). Meaningfulness mediated the effects of CSR on commitment (H3a) and job satisfaction (H3b) but not OCB (H3c). CSR explained 11% of variance in identification, 36% in justice, and 12% of variance in meaningfulness. Table 9 provides a summarizing overview of the results.

To assess if one of the mediators was stronger than the others when all mediators are analyzed simultaneously, we performed pairwise comparisons between indirect effects (Hayes, 2018; MacKinnon, 2000). Concerning commitment, the following indirect effects were statistically different from each other (Table 10): justice was stronger than identification and



meaningfulness. Concerning job satisfaction, justice was stronger than identification and meaningfulness, and meaningfulness was stronger than identification. Concerning OCB, justice was stronger than identification and meaningfulness was stronger than identification.

### **Replication**

The results of the manipulation check indicated that manipulation of CSR was successful. First, we compared the means in the three conditions and performed an ANOVA. The CSR rating differed in the three conditions ( $F(2, 128) = 52.67, p < .001, \eta^2 = .45$ ). Analysis of the means showed that the effects were shaped in the intended direction. Second, we tested if the variables of the manipulation check mediate the relationship between CSR and the mediators. A statistically significant mediation indicates that the manipulation was successful. We found results to confirm this assumption for all mediators, because the confidence intervals did not include zero: for identification, the indirect effect was  $-.21$  (95%  $CI = [.10; .32]$  for C1) and  $.15$  (95%  $CI = [.07; .25]$  for C2); for justice, the indirect effect was  $.52$  (95%  $CI = [.36; .70]$  for C1) and  $.39$  (95%  $CI = [.24; .55]$  for C2); and for meaningfulness, the indirect effect was  $.34$  (95%  $CI = [.20; .50]$  for C1) and  $.25$  (95%  $CI = [.13; .39]$  for C2).

The pattern of the results of the replication study is nearly the same as the pattern in the sample of the main study (Tables 6-8). The results show that organizational identification mediated the effect of CSR on commitment and OCB, but not on job satisfaction. As in the main study, organizational justice mediated the effects of CSR on commitment, job satisfaction, and OCB. Also as in the main study, meaningfulness mediated the effects of CSR on commitment and job satisfaction but not OCB. In summary, all of the results showed in the same direction, except of the mediated effect by identification of CSR on OCB. CSR explained 10% of variance in identification, 37% in justice and 14% of variance in meaningfulness. Table 9 displays an

overview of the main findings concerning mediation hypotheses of the main and replication study.

To assess if one of the mediators was stronger than the others when all of the mediators are analyzed simultaneously, we performed pairwise comparisons between indirect effects (Hayes, 2018; MacKinnon, 2000). Concerning commitment, the following indirect effects were statistically different from each other (Table 10): justice was stronger than identification and meaningfulness. Concerning job satisfaction, justice was stronger than identification and meaningfulness. Concerning OCB, justice and identification were stronger than meaningfulness.

### **Discussion**

In this study, we disentangled mediating effects by investigating *how* CSR unfolds its positive effects on employees. We investigated three explaining mechanisms: organizational identification, organizational justice and meaningfulness. Compared to the total effect, which represents the effect of CSR on the outcome without accounting for any other predictors, the addition of the mediators to the model led to a substantial increase in variance explanation concerning all three outcomes, which means that these underlying psychological processes transmit the effect of CSR on employees. The main findings show that organizational justice successfully mediated the effects of CSR on all three outcomes, meaningfulness mediated the effect of CSR on commitment and job satisfaction but not OCB, and identification only mediated the effect of CSR on commitment. Compared to the other mediators, the indirect effects for justice were stronger than the indirect effects for identification and meaningfulness, and yielded larger effect sizes.

### **Implications for Theory**

Given that identification and commitment are often discussed as being nearly similar and related, yet distinct concepts (Ashforth et al., 2008; Riketta, 2005), it is not an unexpected finding that identification mediated the effect of CSR on commitment. What is surprising, however, is the fact that although social identity theory is the most often used theoretical foundation upon which hypotheses concerning the effect of CSR on employees are derived (Gond et al., 2017), identification did not mediate the effect of CSR on job satisfaction and OCB when the other mediators were investigated simultaneously. For job satisfaction, we did not find a mediation by identification in the main study or in the replication study, and we found mixed results for OCB. Justice mediated the effects of CSR on all outcomes successfully, also meaningfulness except of OCB.

A comparison of the explaining mechanisms showed that organizational justice is the strongest psychological mechanism explaining the effect of CSR on employees compared to identification and meaningfulness. This seems contrary to the large body of research on social identity theory. Our research differs in the following aspects from the majority of existing studies. First, we applied an experimental design, which allows causal interpretations. From our study, we know that CSR has an impact on employees, and that this effect is mostly explained by organizational justice. The more CSR is perceived, the more the organization is perceived as fair and this leads to increased commitment, job satisfaction and OCB. Second, we tested the three most important psychological mechanisms in parallel. This allows us not only to validate (or to fail in validating in the case of identification) the role of the mediators in explaining the effect of CSR on employee in an experimental research design, but also to conclude which psychological mechanism is the strongest. From our study, we learn that the organizational justice approach is best used to explain the effect of CSR on employees compared to social identity theory and the

meaningfulness approach. The indicators of the strength of the indirect effects – the comparison of indirect effects and effect sizes Upsilon for the indirect effects – show a consistent picture, which is also underlined by the variance explanation of CSR in the mediators. Third, we replicated the findings in a second sample. From the exact replication study, we know that our surprising findings are trustworthy.

From a theoretical point of view, it is time to critically reconsider the established role of social identity theory in CSR. For attitudes and behavior, organizational justice explained the effect of CSR on commitment, job satisfaction, and organizational citizenship behavior better. The employees perceive CSR as an indicator of justice. Observing others being treated fairly as beneficiaries of CSR leads to the assumption that they are or will also be treated fairly at their company (Rupp, 2011). This, in turn, leads to affective, attitudinal and behavioral reactions by increasing their affective commitment, job satisfaction and OCB.

For hypothesis testing, only the comparison of the positive condition against the neutral and negative conditions, represented by contrast C1, was relevant. However, examining C2, which compares the neutral condition against the negative condition, provides the following insights: Neutral CSR has a more positive influence on commitment and job satisfaction than negative CSR such as one would assume, and justice is the strongest mediator of the relationship between CSR and all outcomes when the neutral condition is tested against the negative condition. Lin-Hi and Müller (2013) distinguish ‘doing good’ and ‘avoiding bad’ and assume that ‘doing good’ is more effective than ‘avoiding bad’. Also corporate social irresponsibility has been discussed as the opposite pole of CSR. As participants in the negative condition did not rate CSR extremely low in our study (and we did not intend to depict corporate social responsibility in the negative vignette rather than negative CSR), we cannot discuss corporate social

irresponsibility but we conclude that the better a company's CSR is perceived, the stronger and more positive is its influence on employees.

### **Limitations and Perspectives for Future Research**

What we do not know from our study, is the exact interplay of the mediators. Because the majority of studies uses a pertinent theoretical background and findings from studies building hypotheses on several explaining mechanisms are contradictory, we decided to follow the rationale of individual theoretical approaches, and tested the mediators in parallel. However, the role of meaningfulness in the literature has not been as clear as the role of identification in explaining the effect of CSR on employees. For example, meaningfulness often was investigated as a mediator (Raub & Blunschi, 2014; Supanti & Butcher, 2019), but Ong et al. (2018) assumed that meaningfulness *moderates* the relationship between CSR and OCB, with stronger relationships when meaningfulness is high. Organizational justice has also been investigated as a *moderator* of the CSR-identification relationship (De Roeck et al., 2016; Ghosh, 2018). With these studies in mind, it is also conceivable that CSR affects justice; which in turn affects identification and meaningfulness serves as a moderator (De Roeck et al., 2014; Ong et al., 2018). The knowledge that organizational justice is the strongest psychological mechanism clarifies its central role in unifying theory in future. In the past, identification has been assigned the central role (De Roeck et al., 2016; Ghosh, 2018).

In a first attempt to investigate the three most important psychological mechanisms simultaneously, we decided to concentrate on CSR as a whole. Consequently, in our study we did not distinguish between internal and external CSR. This distinction is especially important for organizational justice, because researchers previously hypothesized that only internal CSR (which has stronger relevance to employees) might influence justice perceptions and consecutive

reactions (Rupp et al., 2006). However, De Roeck et al. (2014) found a serial mediation for both internal and external CSR on justice, identification, and job satisfaction, yet internal CSR was more strongly linked to justice than external CSR. On a side note, the relationships of internal and external CSR with identification was comparable in strength. Therefore, future experimental research on CSR and the central role of justice in explaining the impact of CSR on employees should distinguish between internal and external CSR. It would also be interesting to investigate the interaction between internal and external CSR, because it is conceivable that an imbalance of outstanding external CSR combined with poor internal CSR would probably feel unfair to employees. Favoring external over internal stakeholders was perceived as hypocritical and was linked to increased turnover intentions and actual turnover (Scheidler et al., 2019).

Concerning our research methodology, it would have been preferable to manipulate CSR in an organizational setting. Unfortunately, this approach would not enable control of the interfering variables and we would have collected data from only a single company. Using the experimental vignette methodology enabled us to manipulate CSR, made our results less prone to interfering variables (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014) and did not restrict our work to a single company, which makes the results generalizable to many organizational settings.

### **Implications for Practice**

First, employees have to be informed about the CSR initiatives in their company. Only when they perceive CSR can the positive effects of CSR unfold. Therefore, companies have to make sure to communicate CSR activities to their employees, such as in company e-mail newsletters, magazines or posters. Second, companies should focus on promoting the fairness aspects of CSR initiatives in their CSR communication towards employees. For example, they could use slogans connected to the concept of justice, such as “through CSR, we are committed

to a just world” or “promoting fairness through CSR”. Communication containing keywords related to identification (e.g., the frequent use of “we” or language creating a sense of belongingness) or keywords related to meaningfulness (e.g., “serving a higher purpose”) can complete the communication but companies should in any case ensure that the communication and information brochures contain justice-related keywords. Finally, companies should ensure that employees do not experience too great a discrepancy between internal and external CSR (De Roeck et al., 2014; De Roeck et al., 2018) to ensure that they do not feel treated unfair in comparison to other CSR-related beneficiaries.

### **Conclusion**

In CSR research, it was nearly treated as a fact that social identity theory plays an important role in explaining how CSR affects employees. However, most studies were correlational and did not allow causal conclusions. Our study applied an experimental research design and tested the most prominent psychological mechanisms simultaneously. Our results indicate that the organizational justice framework is the most important psychological mechanism and thus it is time to critically reconsider established theoretical assumptions. Future research should examine justice as a psychological mechanism to explain how CSR affects employees.

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**Table 1***Intercorrelations for the Variables under Investigation*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 CSR	—	.01	.01	.32**	.61**	.35**	.59**	.49**	.29**
2 Gender	-.04	—	.16	-.07	.04	-.18*	-.02	.01	.03
3 Age	-.12	.00	—	.07	-.07	.05	.10	-.05	-.02
4 Identification	.30**	-.14	-.10	—	.48**	.39**	.52**	.50**	.46**
5 Justice	.54**	-.02	-.10	.38**	—	.50**	.76**	.77**	.48**
6 Meaningfulness	.31**	-.11	-.17*	.30**	.31**	—	.54**	.53**	.23**
7 Commitment	.53**	-.02	-.09	.49**	.75**	.42**	—	.78**	.50**
8 Job Satisfaction	.43**	-.12	-.20**	.30**	.67**	.45**	.72**	—	.53**
9 OCB	.11	-.16*	.10	.08	.27**	.22**	.35**	.48**	—

*Note.* The results for the main study sample ( $N = 189$ ) are shown below the diagonal. The results for the replication sample ( $N = 131$ ) are shown above the diagonal. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ . Values in *Italic* in diagonal are reliability coefficients. CSR was coded 1 = negative, 2 = neutral, 3 = positive. Gender was coded 1 = male, 2 = female.

**Table 2***Means and Standard Deviations of Variables Under Investigation for the Experimental Conditions*

Variable	Main Study							Replication Study						
	Positive ( <i>N</i> = 63)		Neutral ( <i>N</i> = 64)		Negative ( <i>N</i> = 62)		ES	Positive ( <i>N</i> = 46)		Neutral ( <i>N</i> = 41)		Negative ( <i>N</i> = 44)		ES
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\eta^2$	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\eta^2$
Identification	5.17	0.81	5.09	1.09	4.44	0.93	.11	3.86	0.57	3.64	0.60	3.34	0.73	.10
Justice	3.95	0.72	3.90	0.65	2.74	0.83	.37	5.12	0.75	4.33	0.88	3.43	1.10	.37
Meaningfulness	3.69	0.75	3.14	0.72	3.07	0.84	.12	3.81	0.67	3.17	0.76	3.05	1.03	.14
Commitment	3.63	0.51	3.50	0.56	2.63	0.78	.34	3.67	0.50	3.30	0.69	2.50	0.76	.37
Job Satisfaction	5.47	0.85	5.17	0.96	4.30	1.11	.21	4.77	0.46	4.53	0.58	3.92	0.80	.26
OCB	5.59	0.61	5.46	0.64	5.43	0.54	.01	5.93	0.53	5.78	0.51	5.39	1.05	.09
CSR (MC)	3.89	0.72	3.22	0.93	2.20	0.89	.40	4.07	0.73	3.45	0.85	2.25	0.96	.45

*Note.* ES = effect size. MC = manipulation check

**Table 3**

*Mediation Analyses for the Effect of CSR on Commitment, Mediated by Identification, Justice and Meaningfulness*

Commitment		Consequent														
		Y Commitment			M Identification			M Justice			M Meaningfulness			Y Commitment		
Antecedent		<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
X CSR	C1	0.38	.07	.000	0.26	.10	.009	0.42	.08	.000	0.39	.08	.000	0.09	.05	.084
	C2	0.43	.06	.000	0.34	.08	.000	0.56	.07	.000	0.03	.07	.618	0.13	.05	.011
M Identification		—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.14	.04	.000
M Justice		—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.44	.05	.000
M Meaningfulness		—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.16	.05	.001
Constant		3.25	.05	.000	4.92	.07	.000	3.53	.05	.000	3.30	.06	.000	0.47	.23	.047
		$R^2 = .33$			$R^2 = .11$			$R^2 = .36$			$R^2 = .12$			$R^2 = .65$		
		F(2,184) = 45.40, $p < .001$			F(2,184) = 11.42, $p < .001$			F(2,184) = 52.12, $p < .001$			F(2,184) = 12.23, $p < .001$			F(5,181) = 66.46, $p < .001$		
Indirect Effect	C1				95% <i>CI</i> [.01; .08]			95% <i>CI</i> [.11; .28]			95% <i>CI</i> [.02; .12]					
	C2				95% <i>CI</i> [.01; .10]			95% <i>CI</i> [.17; .34]			95% <i>CI</i> [-.02; .03]					

Note.  $N = 187$ .

**Table 4**

*Mediation Analyses for the Effect of CSR on Job Satisfaction, Mediated by Identification, Justice and Meaningfulness*

Job Satisfaction		Consequent														
		Y Job Satisfaction			M Identification			M Justice			M Meaningfulness			Y Job Satisfaction		
Antecedent		<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
X CSR	C1	0.50	.10	.000	0.26	.10	.009	0.42	.08	.000	0.39	.08	.000	0.07	.09	.408
	C2	0.44	.09	.000	0.34	.08	.000	0.56	.07	.000	0.03	.07	.618	0.05	.08	.579
M Identification		—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	-0.01	.06	.852
M Justice		—	—	—										0.68	.08	.000
M Meaningfulness		—	—	—										0.35	.08	.000
Constant		4.97	.07	.000	4.92	.07	.000	3.53	.05	.000	3.30	.06	.000	1.47	.39	.000
		$R^2 = .21$			$R^2 = .11$			$R^2 = .36$			$R^2 = .12$			$R^2 = .52$		
		F(2,184) = 23.99, $p < .001$			F(2,184) = 11.42, $p < .001$			F(2,184) = 52.12, $p < .001$			F(2,184) = 12.23, $p < .001$			F(5,181) = 39.38, $p < .001$		
Indirect Effects	C1				95% <i>CI</i> [-.04; .04]			95% <i>CI</i> [.16; .44]			95% <i>CI</i> [.06; .24]					
	C2				95% <i>CI</i> [-.05; .05]			95% <i>CI</i> [-.25; .53]			95% <i>CI</i> [-.04; .06]					

Note.  $N = 187$ .

**Table 5***Mediation Analysis for the Effect of CSR on OCB, Mediated by Identification, Justice and Meaningfulness*

OCB		Consequent														
		Y OCB			M Identification			M Justice			M Meaningfulness			Y OCB		
Antecedent		<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
X CSR	C1	0.10	.06	.127	0.26	.10	.009	0.42	.08	.000	0.39	.08	.000	-0.03	.07	.671
	C2	0.01	.05	.822	0.34	.08	.000	0.56	.07	.000	0.03	.07	.618	-0.10	.06	.123
M Identification		—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	-0.03	.05	.579
M Justice		—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.20	.06	.001
M Meaningfulness		—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.12	.06	.049
Constant		5.49	.04	.000	4.92	.07	.000	3.53	.05	.000	3.30	.06	.000	4.53	.29	.000
		$R^2 = .01$			$R^2 = .11$			$R^2 = .36$			$R^2 = .12$			$R^2 = .10$		
		F(2,184) = 1.20, $p = .304$			F(2,184) = 11.42, $p < .001$			F(2,184) = 52.12, $p < .001$			F(2,184) = 12.23, $p < .001$			F(5,181) = 4.23, $p = .001$		
Indirect Effects	C1				95% <i>CI</i> [-.04; .02]			95% <i>CI</i> [.02; .17]			95% <i>CI</i> [-.01; .11]					
	C2				95% <i>CI</i> [-.05; .03]			95% <i>CI</i> [.04; .20]			95% <i>CI</i> [-.02; .03]					

*Note.*  $N = 187$ .



**Table 6**

*Mediation Analyses for the Effect of CSR on Commitment, Mediated by Identification, Justice and Meaningfulness (Replication Study)*

Commitment		Consequent														
		Y Commitment			M Identification			M Justice			M Meaningfulness			Y Commitment		
Antecedent		<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
X CSR	C1	0.51	.08	.000	0.24	.08	.002	0.82	.11	.000	0.47	.10	.000	0.10	.07	.139
	C2	0.40	.07	.000	0.15	.07	.034	0.45	.10	.000	0.06	.09	.510	0.21	.06	.000
M Identification		—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.19	.07	.010
M Justice		—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.34	.05	.000
M Meaningfulness		—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.18	.06	.002
Constant		3.15	.06	.000	3.61	.06	.000	4.29	.08	.000	3.34	.07	.000	0.43	.28	.124
		$R^2 = .37$			$R^2 = .10$			$R^2 = .37$			$R^2 = .14$			$R^2 = .67$		
		F(2,128) = 36.85, $p < .001$			F(2,128) = 7.35, $p = .001$			F(2,128) = 37.87, $p < .001$			F(2,128) = 10.76, $p < .001$			F(5,125) = 51.35, $p < .001$		
Indirect Effect	C1				95% <i>CI</i> [.01; .10]			95% <i>CI</i> [.16; .41]			95% <i>CI</i> [.02; .16]					
	C2				95% <i>CI</i> [.001; .07]			95% <i>CI</i> [.07; .24]			95% <i>CI</i> [-.03; .05]					

Note.  $N = 131$ .

**Table 7**

*Mediation Analysis for the Effect of CSR on Job Satisfaction, Mediated by Identification, Justice and Meaningfulness (Replication)*

Job Satisfaction		Consequent														
		Y Job Satisfaction			M Identification			M Justice			M Meaningfulness			Y Job Satisfaction		
Antecedent		B	SE	p	B	SE	p	B	SE	p	B	SE	p	B	SE	p
		X CSR	C1	0.37	.08	.000	0.24	.08	.002	0.82	.11	.000	0.47	.10	.000	-0.05
C2	0.31		.07	.000	0.15	.07	.034	0.45	.10	.000	0.06	.09	.510	0.11	.05	.035
M Identification		—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.14	.07	.043
M Justice		—	—	—										0.37	.05	.000
M Meaningfulness		—	—	—										0.16	.05	.003
Constant		4.41	.06	.000	3.61	.06	.000	4.29	.08	.000	3.34	.07	.000	1.78	.26	.000
		$R^2 = .26$			$R^2 = .10$			$R^2 = .37$			$R^2 = .14$			$R^2 = .65$		
		F(2,128) = 21.96, $p < .001$			F(2,128) = 7.35, $p = .001$			F(2,128) = 37.87, $p < .001$			F(2,128) = 10.76, $p < .001$			F(5,125) = 45.44, $p < .001$		
Indirect Effects	C1				95% CI [-.04; .04]			95% CI [.16; .44]			95% CI [.06; .24]					
	C2				95% CI [-.05; .05]			95% CI [.25; .53]			95% CI [-.04; .06]					

Note.  $N = 131$ .

**Table 8**

*Mediation Analysis for the Effect of CSR on OCB, Mediated by Identification, Justice and Meaningfulness (Replication Study)*

OCB		Consequent														
		Y OCB			M Identification			M Justice			M Meaningfulness			Y OCB		
Antecedent		<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
X CSR	C1	0.23	.09	.014	0.24	.08	.002	0.82	.11	.000	0.47	.10	.000	-0.04	.10	.712
	C2	0.20	.08	.015	0.15	.07	.034	0.45	.10	.000	0.06	.09	.510	0.04	.08	.618
M Identification		—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.36	.10	.001
M Justice		—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.24	.07	.001
M Meaningfulness		—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	-0.05	.08	.485
Constant		5.70	.07	.000	3.61	.06	.000	4.29	.08	.000	3.34	.07	.000	3.54	.38	.000
		$R^2 = .09$			$R^2 = .10$			$R^2 = .37$			$R^2 = .14$			$R^2 = .30$		
		F(2,128) = 6.30, $p = .003$			F(2,128) = 7.35, $p = .001$			F(2,128) = 37.87, $p < .001$			F(2,128) = 10.76, $p < .001$			F(5,125) = 10.86, $p = .001$		
Indirect Effects	C1				95% <i>CI</i> [.02; .19]			95% <i>CI</i> [.10; .32]			95% <i>CI</i> [-.14; .05]					
	C2				95% <i>CI</i> [.002; .13]			95% <i>CI</i> [.04; .21]			95% <i>CI</i> [-.04; .02]					

Note.  $N = 131$ .

**Table 9***Summary of Main Results Concerning Indirect Effects*

	Identification		Justice		Meaningfulness	
	MS	RS	MS	RS	MS	RS
<b>C1 – Positive against negative and neutral condition (hypothesis relevant)</b>						
Commitment	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Job Satisfaction	X	X	✓	✓	✓	✓
OCB	<b>X</b>	✓	✓	✓	X	X
<b>C2 – Neutral against negative condition (not hypothesis relevant)</b>						
Commitment	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	X
Job Satisfaction	X	X	✓	✓	X	X
OCB	<b>X</b>	✓	✓	✓	X	X

*Note.* MS – main study, RS – replication study, ✓ - successful mediation, X – no mediation, inconsistent findings across studies in bold

**Table 10***Comparison of Indirect Effects and Effect Size Upsilon*

Outcome		Commitment				Job Satisfaction				OCB			
Study		Main		Replication		Main		Replication		Main		Replication	
		$\Delta$	95% CI	$\Delta$	95% CI	$\Delta$	95% CI	$\Delta$	95% CI	$\Delta$	95% CI	$\Delta$	95% CI
Identification	C1	<b>-.15</b>	[-.24; -.06]	<b>-.23</b>	[-.36; -.10]	<b>-.29</b>	[-.42; -.16]	<b>-.27</b>	[-.37; -.17]	<b>-.09</b>	[-.16; -.02]	<b>-.11</b>	[-.22; -.004]
- Justice	C2	<b>-.20</b>	[-.29; -.11]	<b>-.12</b>	[-.21; -.03]	<b>-.39</b>	[-.53; -.25]	<b>-.15</b>	[-.24; -.06]	<b>-.12</b>	[-.21; -.04]	-.06	[-.16; .05]
Identification	C1	-.02	[-.08; .03]	-.04	[-.13; .03]	<b>-.14</b>	[-.23; -.05]	-.04	[-.11; .03]	-.05	[-.11; .01]	<b>.11</b>	[.004; .22]
- Meaningf.	C2	<b>.04</b>	[.002; .08]	.02	[-.03; .06]	-.02	[-.12; .09]	.01	[-.02; .04]	-.01	[-.05; .02]	.06	[-.01; .12]
Justice -	C1	<b>.12</b>	[.03; .22]	<b>.19</b>	[.06; .33]	.15	[-.003; .30]	<b>.23</b>	[.10; .37]	.04	[-.04; .12]	<b>.23</b>	[.06; .39]
Meaningf.	C2	<b>.24</b>	[.16; .33]	<b>.14</b>	[.05; .23]	<b>.37</b>	[.24; .51]	<b>.16</b>	[.07; .25]	<b>.11</b>	[.03; .19]	<b>.11</b>	[.03; .20]

*Notes.*  $N = 187$  (main study),  $N = 131$  (replication study). Significant differences in bold.

