

Article

Corporate Social Responsibility and Employees' Affective Commitment: A Moderated Mediation Study

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Received: 19 June 2020; Accepted: 8 July 2020; Published: 20 July 2020



Abstract: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has mainly been studied at a macro level through its impact on the financial performance of the company. However, individuals' perceptions of CSR influence various attitudes and behaviors at work, including employees' affective commitment. Whereas the relationship between perceptions of CSR and employees' affective commitment has already been shown in the literature, less is known about its underlying mechanisms. This research seeks to specifically explain this relationship in order to understand how perceptions of CSR influence individuals' affective commitment at work. We present two studies (Study 1, $N = 181$; Study 2, $N = 145$) to test a theoretical model that introduces person-organization fit (PO fit) as a mediator of this relationship and the need to belong as a moderator of the relationship between CSR and PO fit. The results of the moderated mediation model (using PLS-SEM) are developed and a discussion is provided.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility (CSR); affective commitment; person-organization fit (PO fit); the need to belong

1. Introduction

The worldwide Covid-19 pandemic is changing employees' perceptions of their workplace. It is also reinforcing the requirements of committed employees towards their organizations. On one hand, employees are looking for more meaning at work. One way to obtain this meaning is to work for a socially responsible organization. On the other hand, since the crisis has profoundly altered the financial health of companies, committed employees are needed more than ever for the continuity of the business activity. The aim of this paper is to show precisely how employees' perceptions of corporate social responsibility (CSR) are related to their commitment towards their organization.

Indeed, whereas first research on CSR focused mainly on organizational activities [1] and institutional activities [2], it has been shown that non-financial results might also be related to advantages gained through the practice of CSR [3]. For example, research has recently examined the role of CSR in employees' attitudes and behaviors. This stream of research is commonly called micro CSR [4,5]. Studies on micro CSR have been conducted mainly on investors [6], consumers [7–9], and potential candidates [10,11]. The literature has shown that CSR improves a company's image and reputation, which in turn increases interest from customers, job candidates, and stakeholders. However, despite the importance of the internal stakeholders, who constitute the most important component for success with any CSR policy, studies examining the impact of CSR on employees are rather scarce. Relying on Aguinis and Glavas [12], only 4% of the research papers (from a sample of 17 CSR reviews) examine perceptions of CSR at the individual level of analysis.

CSR has an important impact on employees' attitudes and behaviors [12,13], such as confidence [14], organizational identification [15,16], organizational commitment [17], and citizenship behavior [18–22]. Organizational commitment refers to the strength of an individual's attachment to his or her organization [23] and appears to be one of the most powerful indicators of work performance and other positive organizational outcomes [24]. Previous studies on the relationship between CSR and commitment have focused mainly on the linear as well as the positive relationship [17]. However, findings of this research are not conclusive because the results do not help to explain clearly why, how, and when CSR improves organizational commitment. Therefore, we believe that the underlying mechanisms as well as the boundary conditions of this relationship remain unexamined thus far [4,25].

The present study fills this theoretical gap by considering person–organization fit (PO fit) as an underlying mechanism to explain how employees' perceptions of their organizational affective commitment are affected by their perceptions of CSR. Relying on the deontic justice theory [26], we suggest that CSR increases employees' organizational commitment by improving their PO fit. Furthermore, we suggest that the magnitude of the effect of CSR on organizational commitment is influenced by the need to belong. By opening the black box of the CSR perceptions–commitment relationship, we thus contribute to a better understanding of the micro CSR effects on employees' attitudes and behaviors.

2. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

2.1. PO Fit as a Mediator of the Employees' Perception of CSR and Organizational Commitment Relationship

Since the 1950s, there have been numerous attempts to build a conceptualization of CSR [27]. Despite various efforts, it is still difficult today to find a consensual definition [12]. If the literature refers systematically to Carroll's [28] definition, which is cited by most researchers, other definitions can be found which are more comprehensive and adapted to the context of companies. For example, the stakeholders theory [29–32] is considered to be a new attempt to describe the construction of CSR theory and takes into account the role played by the attitudes and behaviors of the internal and external stakeholders in the sustainability of the company [3]. Thus, in this study, we rely on the conceptualization proposed by Turker [19] (p. 189), who defined CSR as “corporate behaviours that aim to affect stakeholders positively and that go beyond its economic interests.”

Previous research has examined the attitudes and behaviors of internal stakeholders (the employees). Specifically, this research has examined the reaction of employees to how they are treated within their company (i.e., where employees are victims). Our study relies on the third-party approach developed by Rupp et al. [33], which suggests that employees are also sensitive to the treatment received by other individuals (third parties). As a consequence, employees' attitudes and behaviors might be a reaction to these treatments (good or bad), even if they are not personally concerned. These stakeholders may be the other employees of the company, the clients, the government, and the public authorities [34].

Subjective and individual perceptions of CSR are particularly important to explain employees' outcomes [12,13,35]. On the one hand, relying on the cognitive theory, these perceptions might include salient information about attitudes, decisions, and employees' behaviors, because they reflect a major part of the employees' reality [36]. On the other hand, employees of the same company may have different judgments about the company's CSR practices [12,37]. As underlined by Rupp and colleagues [13] (p. 897): “*how employees perceive the CSR of their employer may actually have more direct and stronger implications for employees' subsequent reactions than actual firm behaviors of which employees may or may not be aware.*” Consequently, it would be interesting to pay more attention to the role of employees' perceptions to understand how their company's CSR affects them.

Despite the growing amount of research on micro CSR [5,35,38], the understanding of individual behaviors in such companies remains limited [4]. Unfortunately, few studies have examined employees' reactions, despite the fact that employees represent the principal component of any company. Only a

few studies have offered a theoretical examination of CSR at the individual level [4,5,39]. For example, it has been shown that perceptions of CSR have consequences on confidence [14], satisfaction [3,40], organizational identification [15,16], work engagement [17], retention [25], citizenship behavior [25,41], performance at work [25,42], and creative participation [17]. Another salient research focus which is particularly important for our study is the existing relationship between individual perceptions of CSR and organizational commitment [18,20–22,43,44].

The definition of organizational commitment has evolved since the 1970s. Among the published definitions, organizational commitment refers to the degree of identification with and implication for the company [45], the psychological state that is found in the relationship between employees and their organization [46], and the force that pushes employees to carry out good actions for their companies [47]. A simple definition of organizational commitment would be the individual's attachment to his or her company, which may affect personal intention to leave or stay. Today, organizational commitment is considered to be a central subject for human resources, organizational psychology, and organizational behavior research because of its various consequences for the company, such as the intention to leave, employee turnover, and performance at work [48]. The managerial literature presents three forms of organizational commitment [49]: (1) affective commitment, which is emotional, is associated with the desire to belong to the company and the desire to stay there; (2) normative commitment is related to the feeling of the employees that they should stay in the company because it is their duty, and (3) continuance commitment, which takes into account the cost of leaving the company. However, the results from previous research show that affective commitment is the most powerful dimension of organizational commitment [50]. This affective dimension increases individuals' feelings of belonging, which in turn makes individuals more likely to exert extra efforts in their companies compared to individuals who feel only the "need" or the "obligation" to belong [51]. Moreover, all previous studies on the relationship between employees' perception of CSR and their organizational commitment have examined affective commitment as an outcome [19–21,52]. Because our aim is to explain the underlying mechanism of the CSR–commitment relationship by opening the black box, using the same form of commitment might be more relevant. Finally, affective commitment is more appropriate than continuance or normative commitment to deal with work experiences and variables which integrate a moral dimension [47], such as the variables used in this study. Hence, the focus will be on organizational affective commitment as a consequence of perceptions of CSR.

The relationship between employees' perception of CSR and their organizational commitment has already been examined in the literature. However, it is crucial to understand the underlying mechanisms of this relationship for a closer examination [19,20,52–55]. For example, Farooq et al. [52] argued that for a better comprehension of the effect of perceptions of CSR on organizational affective commitment, it is important to consider confidence as well as organizational identification as mediators of this relationship. Similarly, Kim et al. [56] showed that organizational identification is a mediator of the relationship between perceptions of CSR and organizational affective commitment. However, despite the importance of these mediators, underlying mechanisms that include personal morals have been neglected by the literature.

The deontic theory [57,58], or the moral theory of justice, represents an innovative and promising line of research for a better comprehension of individuals' reactions to the CSR practices of their companies [59]. Deontic theory suggests a conceptualization centered on the individual without any economic or relational interest. It argues that fair treatments of others matter for individuals because they believe it is a moral virtue [60,61] and an end in itself [57,58]. In this research, deontic theory provides a justification for the mediating role of the congruence between individuals' and organizations' values in the study of the effects of perceptions of CSR on affective commitment [62]. We operationalize this mediation through the variable PO fit [62].

PO fit is defined as the compatibility between individuals and their organizations [63]. According to the theory of PO fit, the nature of compatibility may be of a different nature [64]. In a good PO fit, individuals are aligned with the goals, needs, and values of the organization. In this study,

we focus on the alignment of the perceptions related to values such as those emanating from CSR practices for several reasons. First, considering the micro CSR perspective, perceptions are examined at the individual and subjective levels and values are determined by employees' perceptions [65]. Furthermore, values seem to be an important criterion in the decisions and choices that individuals make in their companies (e.g., participation in the CSR policies). They are also important for the communication concerning the organizational culture which can be CSR-related [66]. Additionally, values that represent the beliefs of the individuals are sustainable and difficult to change over time [67]. They are more consistent [68] and relatively more stable when studying individual outcomes [67]. Finally, values are important because they have the potential to determine and influence a variety of employee attitudes and behaviors [69,70].

The literature on PO fit has shown the impact of the congruence between individuals' and organizations' values. For example, results from studies show that individuals who are in harmony with their company's values are more likely to be satisfied and efficient at work [71]. Likewise, the similarity between individuals' and organizations' values increases the efficiency of individuals at work [72]. Moreover, when individuals' and organizations' values are aligned, companies are more likely to attract and retain employees [67,73,74]. That is to say, when employees share the moral values conveyed by the company through their CSR practices, they are more likely to be committed to this company.

In this research, we consider that employees tend to perceive CSR practices as a moral obligation of the organization. According to the theoretical framework of deontic justice as applied to micro CSR, employees evaluate fair treatment and the respect of the moral principles through CSR actions. They also assess the procedures applied and the interactions that occur with all stakeholders [38]. Individuals will be more attracted by companies with values that strengthen their moral obligation and that respect fairness norms and human dignity. Thus, in a socially responsible organization, PO fit theory implies a similarity between the values of the company and those of the employees, and it is supposed to relate to the sharing of certain values, such as ethics, fairness, and responsibility.

More explicitly, when employees perceive that their company treats their colleagues and other stakeholders (third parties) fairly, they are more likely to share these values, which strengthen their organizational affective commitment [62]. Since these values are already part of employees' belief systems, the PO fit shows that these moral convictions have been respected and esteemed. This feeling leads employees to stay in their company and to be affectively committed, because their company shares and enhances the same moral principles as they do [75]. Thus, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *PO fit mediates the relationship between the perception of overall CSR and organizational affective commitment.*

2.2. The Moderating Role of the Need to Belong

In a study focusing on CSR as a source of employees' satisfaction, Bauman and Skitka [40] identified four fundamental psychological needs that affect employees' relationships with their company, namely, security, belonging, esteem, and meaning. The need to belong is considered as one of the most important needs for individuals; only meeting physical needs (survival, food) might compete with the need to belong. Given the importance of the feeling of belonging in the relationship between perceptions of CSR and commitment [76], this study examines the potential impact of the need to belong on individuals' reactions to CSR.

The need to belong is defined as a strong desire of belonging to and being accepted by a group [77]. It is what motivates individuals to form and maintain positive, meaningful and long-lasting interpersonal relationships [78]. In other words, the need to belong is a human need to be loved and socially accepted [78]. Because individuals are social animals, they seek to live in social groups and to

interact and cooperate with others. Moreover, belonging to social groups helps individuals to cope with various stressors and thus improves their wellbeing [78,79].

People are very often worried about not being accepted and not belonging to a group [77]. They are very afraid of being excluded by others [80] and any form of exclusion is lived as a punishment [81]. Consequently, they tend to make more effort to obtain satisfying relationships, as underlined by Baumeister and Leary [78] (p. 497): “*Human beings have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships.*” These efforts include conformity, obedience, and a change in attitudes and behaviors in a general manner in order to show themselves the most favorable light [80]. That is to say, to be accepted by social groups, people will engage in affiliative and conformity behaviors such as consenting to agreements without questioning or refraining from voicing contradictory opinions [78,82,83]. They are also willing to engage in unethical behaviors if highly valued by the group in order to avoid exclusion [84]. Thus, people are capable of expressing themselves in a non-authentic way to avoid the risk of rejection.

For example, people might be willing to commit criminal acts in order to be accepted by a group [85] where the membership is often assimilated with total conformity and commitment [86]. Furthermore, studies have shown that the need to belong motivates individuals to behave appropriately according to the context [87], to be more agreed with social signals [88] and to exhibit behavioral conformity [89].

Based on the above, we argue that the need to belong offers an additional understanding of the effects of CSR perceptions on employees’ attitudes and behaviors. Specifically, our study hypothesizes a moderating relationship in which the need to belong changes the relationship between perceptions of CSR and the PO fit so that when the need to belong is high, the relationship between CSR and PO fit is low.

The need to belong fulfills fundamental psychological needs such as affiliation, sociability, and security. Consequently, the absence or lack of satisfaction of this need may threaten this core social need and impair the well-being of the individuals, which may in turn generate negative feelings and states such as depression, loneliness, neuroticism, and social isolation. In order to minimize these negative feelings and the risk of rejection, individuals will change either their thoughts or their behaviors [78]. Specifically, individuals might ignore their moral consideration in order to satisfy their need to belong [90]. In other words, individuals would be willing to change their opinion about a situation that goes against their values in order to fulfill their inner need for belonging. Thus, when employees have a high need to belong and a low perception of their organization’s CSR, they will tend to ignore the incongruence between their values and those of their organization in order to “safeguard” their belonging to the group. As suggested by Leary [91], when individuals have a high need to belong, they tend to profit from social situations by conforming to others’ opinions and behaviors. Indeed, when the need to belong is high, individuals are more likely to look inwards and stay focused on themselves [92] and to adopt an individualistic approach [93] in order to avoid the risk of rejection.

In this perspective, perceptions of CSR are more likely to have fewer effects on individuals because they pay less attention to their environment. That is to say, we suggest that even if employees have a low perception of CSR practices of their company, they will minimize the impact of this information in order to stay aligned with the values of their company and fulfill their high need to belong. Therefore, the need to belong has the potential to buffer the need for morality and may moderate the effects of perceptions of CSR (cf. Figure 1). Based on the previous discussion, the following hypothesis is developed:

Hypothesis 2 (H2). *The need to belong moderates the direct effect of overall perceptions of CSR on PO fit such that the relationship between perceptions of CSR and PO fit is weaker when the need to belong is high compared to when it is low.*

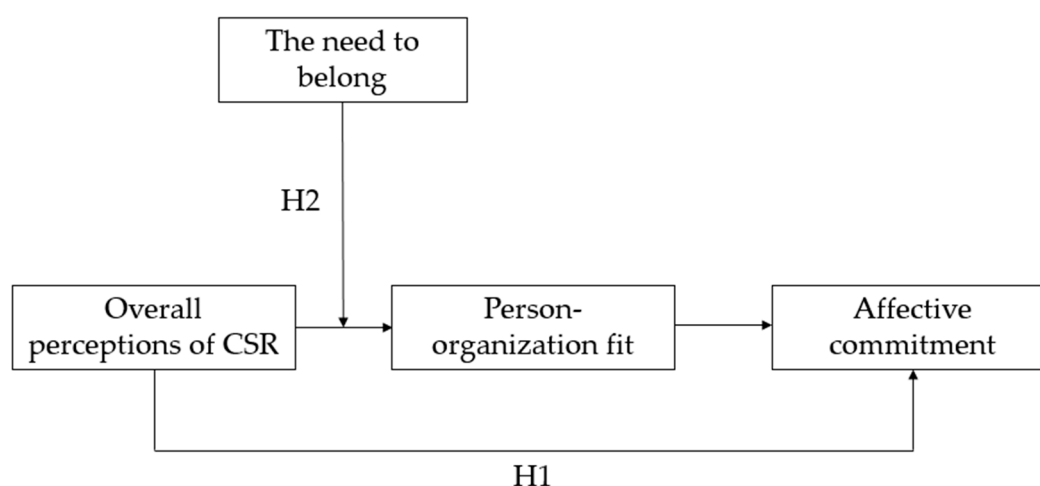


Figure 1. Research model.

3. Method and Results

To test our hypotheses, we conducted two studies with two different samples. The first study tested the mediating hypothesis. The second study tested the mediating and moderating hypotheses.

3.1. Study 1

3.1.1. Sample and Procedure

Data were collected from 20 academic institutions in Tunisia (schools and universities). After informing the participants about the voluntary and confidential participation in our study, teachers involved in the study were asked to evaluate the overall perception of CSR, the PO fit, and the affective commitment regarding their institution. A total of 181 teachers responded to our questionnaire. Of the respondents, 56% were women (Table 1).

Table 1. The demographic characteristics of the respondents (Study 1).

Demographic Characteristics	Number of Participants	Percentage
Sex		
Male	80	44.19
Female	101	55.81
Age		
<26 years	5	3.10
26–35	70	43.47
36–45	59	36.64
46–55	24	14.90
56+	3	1.86
Level of education		
Middle school	1	0.55
High school	0	0
University (2 years)	0	0
University (3 or 4 years)	6	3.33
University (5 years or more)	173	96.11
Tenure		
Less than 1 year	12	6.66
between 1 and 3 years	37	20.55
between 3 and 10 years	87	48.33
More than 10 years	44	24.44

If the notion of CSR is relatively well present nowadays in public policies and academic debates in developed countries, its scope and the concrete methods of its implementation in the context of emerging economies such as Tunisia remains little developed. Officially, the concept of CSR in Tunisia emerged in the early 2000s with the launch of the United Nations Global Compact CSR program. Therefore, concerns for CSR or corporate commitment to sustainable development are not a new phenomenon in Tunisia. Following the global trend, the Tunisian public authorities have multiplied the actions to raise global awareness of sustainable development. As a result, Tunisian companies have engaged in CSR mainly to benefit from subsidies from the government and to respect the current regulatory framework. Additionally, institutional transformations undertaken in Tunisia since 2011 tend towards more democracy and social justice. As part of this transformation, Tunisian companies have played an important role which can be translated through corporate social responsibly practices. However, even if CSR has been introduced in Tunisian companies for several years, the concept can still be better integrated by business leaders, employees or consumers.

3.1.2. Measures

The items used in this study were extracted from the existing literature. Because French is the second language in Tunisia and all teachers speak French, we had to translate our scales from English to French. In order to do so, we used the translation-back translation procedure. We first translated from English to French, then, to ensure the conservation of the meaning, we translated from French to English [94]. Responses were filled on seven-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 7 (totally agree).

Overall perceptions of CSR ($\alpha = 0.946$). We used the 17-item scale of Turker [34], which is focused on stakeholders, to measure employees' perceptions of CSR, (e.g., Our company participates to the activities which aim to protect and improve the quality of the natural environment). The structure of this scale includes CSR to social and nonsocial stakeholders, employees, customers, and government.

Affective commitment ($\alpha = 0.862$). Organizational affective commitment was measured using the Allen and Meyer [48] six-item organizational commitment scale. This scale has been used extensively in different studies (e.g., I really feel as if this company's problems are my own.).

PO fit ($\alpha = 0.937$). We used the Cable and Judge [95] three-item scale to measure the extent to which the values of the individuals fit with the values of the organization (e.g., The things that I value in life are very similar to the things that my organization values.).

3.1.3. Statistical Analyses

To test the hypotheses of our model, we used partial least square structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) through the SmartPLS 3 software [96]. To estimate the parameters, we used a 95% bias corrected and accelerated bootstrap generated from 500 samples. Before testing the model, we first assess internal validity.

3.1.4. Results

Table 2 presents the Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), mean, variance, and correlations among the variables.

Table 2. Descriptive analyses and variables correlations.

Variables	Cronbach (α)	Mean	CR	Variance	(1)	(2)
(1) CSR	0.946	3.33	0.95	1.26	1	
(2) Affective commitment	0.862	4.96	0.89	1.30	0.536 **	1
(3) Person-organization fit	0.937	3.70	0.96	1.59	0.606 **	0.443 **

Notes: $N = 181$; ** significant correlation at $p < 0.01$

Cronbach's alphas and composite reliability were all above the 0.7 cutoff, which shows adequate internal consistency reliability. We also test discriminant validity through the heterotrait–monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) criteria [97]. All indicators range between 0.5 and 0.64, below the conservative threshold value of 0.85. We can conclude that our model shows adequate discriminant validity.

H1 predicted that PO fit would mediate the effect of overall perceptions of CSR on individuals' affective commitment. The results (Table 3) show a significant and positive effect of overall perceptions of CSR on organizational affective commitment ($b = 0.40$, $p < 0.01$, $SD = 0.07$; zero is outside the 95% confidence interval [CI]). The results also show the following:

- Perception of CSR has a positive effect on PO fit ($b = 0.61$, $SE = 0.05$).
- PO fit has a positive effect on affective commitment ($b = 0.23$, $SE = 0.08$).
- The indirect effect of overall CSR is 0.14 ($p < 0.01$; CI 95% [0.05 0.24]).

Table 3. Regression analyses of the mediating effects.

Effect	<i>b</i>	SD	CI 95%
Effect of overall perception of CSR on PO fit	0.61 **	0.05	[0.6162 0.9118]
Effect of PO fit on affective commitment	0.23 **	0.08	[0.0265 0.2809]
Effect of perception of CSR on affective commitment	0.40 **	0.07	[0.2786 0.5992]

Notes: $N = 181$; PO fit: person-organization fit; ** significant correlation at $p < 0.01$.

The results reveal that the CI of the indirect effect is significantly different from zero. Thus, Hypothesis 1, which suggests PO fit is a mediator of the relationship between perception of CSR and affective commitment, is supported.

3.2. Study 2

3.2.1. Sample and Procedure

Data were collected from 145 employees in the United Kingdom via Prolific Academic, a crowdsourcing platform dedicated to academic research. First, we informed participants about the voluntary and confidential participation in the study, then we invited them to evaluate CSR, PO fit, the need to belong, and affective commitment regarding their company. A total of 145 employees working in large private companies responded to our questionnaire. Of the respondents, 51% were women, 65% were less than 38 years old and 41% of the employees had worked in the same company for 5 years.

3.2.2. Measures

The same scales of CSR, affective commitment and PO fit of Study 1 were used to measure the variables in Study 2.

The need to belong ($\alpha = 0.77$). We used 4 items from the Leary et al. [77] scale, which measures the strength of the individual's need to belong (e.g., I try hard not to do things that will make other people avoid or reject me).

3.2.3. Statistical Analyses

To test the hypotheses of our model, we used, as in study one, partial least square structural equation modeling with SMARTPLS 3. To estimate the parameters, we used a 95% bias corrected and accelerated bootstrap generated from 500 samples.

3.2.4. Results

Table 4 presents the Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, mean, standard deviation, and correlations among the variables. Cronbach's alphas and composite reliability were all above

the 0.7 cutoff and thus show adequate internal consistency reliability. We also tested discriminant validity through the heterotrait–monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) criteria [97]. All indicators range between 0.11 and 0.78. Because they are below the conservative threshold value of 0.85, we can conclude that our constructs are empirically distinct from other constructs in the structural model. This thus shows adequate discriminant validity.

Table 4. Descriptive analyses and variable correlations.

Variables	Cronbach (α)	CR	Mean	SD	(1)	(2)	(3)
(1) CSR	0.92	0.93	4.87	0.95	1		
(2) Affective commitment	0.87	0.90	4.35	1.34	0.61 **	1	
(3) Person-organization fit	0.89	0.91	4.26	1.25	0.71 **	0.67 **	1
(4) The need to belong	0.77	0.79	4.11	0.83	0.04	0.07	0.03

Notes: $N = 161$; ** significant correlation at $p < 0.01$

H1 predicted that PO fit would mediate the effect of overall perception of CSR on individuals' affective commitment. Using the PLS-SEM structural model and the bootstrap method, we tested the direct effect and the mediating effect of PO fit. Table 5 exhibits the results of the analysis, showing that overall perception of CSR is positively and significantly linked to organizational affective commitment ($b = 0.27$, $p < 0.05$, $SD = 0.06$; zero is outside the 95% CI). The results also show the following:

- Perception of CSR has a positive effect on PO fit ($b = 0.68$, $SD = 0.06$).
- PO fit has a positive effect on affective engagement ($b = 0.50$, $SD = 0.09$).
- The indirect effect of overall perception of CSR on affective commitment is 0.34 ($SD = 0.07$; CI 95% [0.34; 0.48]).

Table 5. Regression analyses of the mediating effects.

Effect	b	SD	CI 95%
Effect of overall perception of CSR on PO fit	0.68 **	0.06	[0.54; 0.75]
Effect of PO fit it on affective commitment	0.50 **	0.09	[0.32; 0.69]
Effect of overall perception of CSR on affective commitment	0.27 **	0.06	[0.07; 0.46]
Effect of need to belong on PO fit	0.05	0.03	[−0.1; 0.15]
Effect of the interaction of perception of CSR and need to belong on PO fit	−0.15 *	0.06	[−0.29; −0.07]

Notes: $N = 145$; PO fit: person-organization fit; ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

The results reveal that the CI of the indirect effect is significantly different from zero. Thus, Hypothesis 1, which introduces PO fit as a mediator of the relationship between perception of CSR and affective commitment, is supported. H2 introduces the need to belong as a moderator in the direct effect of overall perception of CSR and PO fit. The results of the moderating effect show a significant and negative interaction between overall perception of CSR and the need to belong ($b = -0.15$, $SD = 0.06$). Thus, H2 is supported. Figure 2 presents the significant interaction pattern at plus and minus one standard deviation of the moderator [98]. In line with H2, the relationship between overall perception of CSR and PO fit is lower in the presence of the moderator, the need to belong. Thus, both the mediating and the moderating hypotheses are supported.

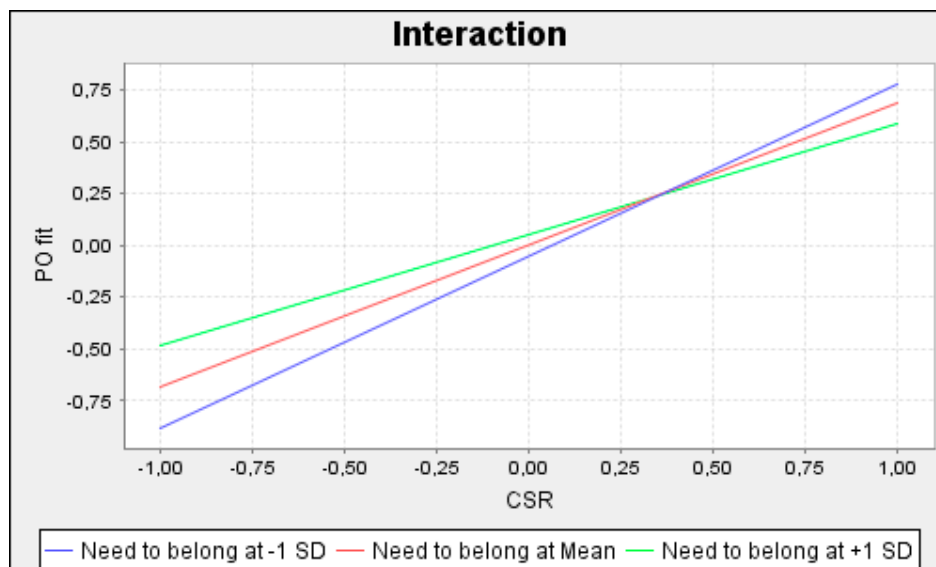


Figure 2. The need to belong as a moderator of the effect of the perception of CSR and PO fit.

4. Discussion

The aim of this research was to examine the effect of perceptions of CSR on affective commitment by introducing the PO fit as a mediator and the need to belong as a moderator of this relationship. The results show that employees are sensitive to CSR actions because they enhance their feeling of sharing the same values as their company and, in turn, will increase successively their level of affective commitment. The results also show that for individuals who have a high need to belong, the effect of CSR on affective commitment is less salient for moral reasons. The findings of our studies yielded several theoretical and managerial implications, which are discussed in the following sections.

4.1. Theoretical Implications

This research provides several contributions to the literature. First, our study enhances the understanding of the consequences of individual perceptions of CSR. Specifically, our research focuses on micro perceptions of CSR in a response to the call of several authors for more research on this subject (e.g., [4]). Micro CSR perceptions refer to the activities that might affect employees' attitudes and behaviors at the individual level [99].

Although previous research examined the positive impact of CSR strategies on financial performance at the macroeconomic level [100], our study goes further by stressing the importance of the underlying consequences of CSR at the individual level. Despite the burgeoning studies that examined this level of analysis [25], few studies have emphasized employees' perceptions of CSR specifically [39]. Indeed, a growing body of research has started to examine micro CSR under the light of the stakeholders' approach. However, among all the stakeholders identified and related to the organization, the employees are not present in the micro CSR literature. Thus, our first contribution is the focus on employees' perceptions of CSR, as suggested by Glavas and Godwin [15] and Valentine and Fleischman [101], and to show the necessity of studying individual subjective measures of CSR [102]. Our results show that positive perceptions of CSR have a positive effect on employees' affective commitment. Commitment outcome might be, in turn, related to other positive organizational results, such as productivity, which might contribute to a larger overall organizational performance. Our study adds to the development of the individual approach of CSR by focusing on employees.

Second, our study confirms an underlying mechanism in deontological terms to explain the relationship between perceptions of CSR and employees' reactions [62]. Previous research has considered that the relationship between CSR perceptions and employees' attitudes and behaviors, including organizational commitment, was direct [19,21]. Our second contribution is to focus on the

underlying psychological mechanisms found in the micro CSR literature. Given that the relationship between perceptions of CSR and individuals' reactions are rather complex [4], it is important to understand how this relationship works. Specifically, our research introduces PO fit as a mediator to better understand the relationship between individuals' perceptions of CSR and their affective commitment. Unlike previous research that considered social identity and social exchange as the main theoretical frameworks of the underlying mechanisms of the relationship between CSR perceptions and individual reactions [76], our research introduces deontic justice theory by showing that affective commitment derives from a moral perspective of respecting justice. Because deontic theory has rarely been considered in the CSR literature [62], we contribute to the micro CSR literature by responding to the call of Rupp et al. [33] for more studies to examine other underlying mechanisms, different from social exchange and organizational identification, in order to substantially change the ways of considering CSR perceptions. Indeed, social identity and social exchange presents CSR perceptions as something important for the personal interest of the individuals. Relying on this perspective, employees are sensitive to the CSR actions of their company mainly because of the positive consequences expected (whether economic or social). However, by integrating personal morals into this framework, we show that CSR matters for employees because they care about their company's actions independently from the material interest.

Finally, our research contributes to the micro CSR literature by examining the complex processes derived from the effects of perceptions of CSR on employees' attitudes and behaviors. Specifically, our third contribution is to introduce a moderator, namely, the need to belong, to provide a better understanding of this complexity. The need to belong is a fundamental human need that leads to changes in beliefs, attitudes and behaviors to avoid the risk of rejection. In order to maintain their belongingness to a group, people are willing to conform to standards and change their opinion to avoid social exclusion. By introducing this moderator, our research examines how having high vs. low need to belong affects the relationship between CSR perceptions and person–organization fit. Our results show that individuals with high need to belong are willing to ignore their low perception of CSR in order to stay aligned with the organizations' values and avoid the risk of rejection. Conversely, individuals who have low need to belong will be more sensitive to their perceptions of CSR because they will not be worried about social exclusion. Thus, the present study explains why everybody does not respond in a same way to CSR because of a particular characteristic. Parallel to understanding the underlying mechanisms of the effect of CSR, our study underlines the utmost importance in studying individual differences in the applicability of these mechanisms.

4.2. Managerial Implications

The findings of this study also provide practical contributions by showing the importance of employee perceptions. Indeed, the results show that in order to obtain better outcomes, companies should improve employee perceptions of CSR because a positive perception of CSR has a positive effect on the level of affective commitment of employees. Commitment has a positive effect on other employee outcomes (e.g., productivity), which might, in turn, contribute to larger overall organizational performance. Thus, it is essential for managers to address communications to employees about CSR actions that are implemented inside the organization in order to benefit from the positive outcomes. Furthermore, managers could specifically target employees who have a low level of need to belong because our findings show that employees who have a low level of need to belong are more likely to respond favorably to perceptions of CSR in terms of positive effects on PO fit and affective commitment.

4.3. Limits and Future Directions

This research is subject to limitations that also suggest interesting avenues for future research. First, the research used two samples. The first one is composed of employees who work permanently in Tunisian schools and universities where CSR initiatives and efforts are not developed sufficiently to

sensitize employees to CSR policies. The second one is composed of employees working in large UK private companies. Thus, it would be interesting for future research to avoid such cultural context particularities and collect data from additional sources. Second, we hope our research could be replicated in international companies that have more interest in CSR initiatives, especially after the Tunisian Jasmine Revolution. Third, this research did not test other sub-dimensions of CSR. It would be interesting for future research to examine the role of each dimension of CSR in order to confirm if the effects are similar or different regarding employee outcomes. Finally, future research should explore the effects of the macroeconomic variables on individual results by relying on a multilevel empirical and theoretical model.

5. Conclusions

The present study provides theoretical and empirical contributions to the micro CSR literature by revealing both the internal mediating process and the contingent factor to explain the CSR-commitment link. The study shows the important role of employees' perception of their person-organization fit as well as the role of their need to belong as a critical mediator and moderator to describe the CSR perceptions-affective commitment relationship. Beyond the traditional self-oriented approach, this paper integrates deontic research into the CSR literature by emphasizing the importance of the congruence of values, which is reflected by the concept of PO fit. Moreover, the current research showed the essential role of the need to belong in this process. Overall, we hope these efforts will be a helpful contribution to the micro CSR literature.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, K.B. and M.O.; methodology, K.B.; software, M.O.; validation, K.B., M.O. and; formal analysis, K.B. and M.O.; investigation, K.B.; resources, K.B.; data curation, K.B. and M.O.; writing—Original draft preparation, K.B. and S.B.; writing—Review and editing, S.B. and M.O.; visualization, S.B. and M.O.; supervision, M.O.; project administration, M.O. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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