

## **CSR fit and organizational attractiveness for job applicants**

**Purpose:** The paper's objective is to explore a conceptual model on the influence of CSR “fit” on organizational attractiveness among job applicants under the boundary conditions of CEO activism and CSR credibility.

**Design/ Method:** The study is based on archival research, largely reviewing extant literature in CSR and drawing propositions based on existing theory

**Findings:** The paper draws propositions based on the literature on CSR fit, credibility, and CEO activism. Our paper asserts the influence of CSR fit on organizational attractiveness among job applicants. It further explains moderated mediating mechanism through which CSR fit influences organizational attractiveness among job applicants.

**Originality:** Recruitment literature has primarily explored the role of CSR in attracting potential job candidates. In this paper, we present the role of CSR “fit,” an aspect not explored before in recruitment literature. We also introduce the role of CEO activism in recruitment literature.

**Keywords:** CSR fit, CEO activism, CSR credibility, job applicant, organizational attractiveness

**Paper Type:** Conceptual paper

## Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a critical success factor for an organization's reputation and performance (Aguinis and Glavas, 2012; Bučiūnienė and Kazlauskaitė, 2012). CSR, which has been defined as “a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis” (Commission of the European Communities, 2001b, p. 6), the literature has primarily explored its marketing implications for the firms and their offered brands. Relatively scant literature explores CSR's impact on employees and potential job applicants (Alshathry *et al.*, 2017; Rupp *et al.*, 2013; Turner *et al.*, 2019). Commonly referred to as micro-CSR, when researchers explore CSR implications from an organizational or work psychology perspective, the field has gained traction in recent years (Babu *et al.*, 2020; Girschik *et al.*, 2020; Jones *et al.*, 2017). As per this field, organizational CSR activities has a positive influence on several employee behaviors (Rupp *et al.*, 2006), such as better citizenship behavior of employees (Shen and Benson, 2016), better employee engagement (Gallup, 2013), or better employee creativity (Amabile, 1998) among others (refer to Glavas, 2016, for a meta-analysis of CSR literature).

Leveraging theories such as signaling or social identity theories (Albinger and Freeman, 2000; Greening and Turban, 2000; Jones *et al.*, 2009; Jones *et al.*, 2019; Randy and Davis, 2011), literature has explored the impact of CSR activities on job applicants (Gond *et al.*, 2017). However, results have been mostly mixed, with some studies suggesting positive influence while other studies suggested no or negative influence on job applicants (Bridoux and Stofberg, 2016; Maon *et al.*, 2019; Zhang and Gowan, 2012). This may happen as it is not CSR but congruence between CSR and core operations of an organization, referred to as *CSR fit* that determines an organization's attractiveness (Porter and Kramer, 1998). For example, environmental responsiveness is more

critical for firms belonging to automobile or metallurgy industries than for the retailing industry. Thus, when a firm focuses on less relevant CSR activities, potent employees may perceive this as a symbolic initiative and not a true CSR initiative, thus decreasing the campaign's credibility and organization attractiveness (Donia *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, CSR activity is not just a fit between CSR and the industry's nature to which a firm belongs, which may influence the firm's job applicants' attitude. However, the micro-CSR literature has not explored employees' or job applicants' attraction to an organization leveraging CSR fit perspective. Given the significance of CSR in attracting potential job applicants to the organization (Jones *et al.*, 2014), exploring this gap of CSR's strategic fit in micro-CSR literature is vital to explore. We rely on cue consistency theory (Slovic, 1966) to elaborate the significance of CSR fit in recruitment literature, thus exploring the impact of CSR “fit” on organizational attractiveness for job applicants towards the organization.

Furthermore, we know very little about underlying mechanisms and contingency factors that suggest how CSR influences job applicants' organizational attractiveness. Few variables considered so far are individual-level variables, such as perceived organizational justice (Joo *et al.*, 2016) as mediators and moderators like CSR education or socio-environmental consciousness or moral identity for CSR and organizational attractiveness relationship (Randy and Davis, 2011; Rupp *et al.*, 2013; Tsai *et al.*, 2014). Jones *et al.* (2014) called for more research on the mechanisms and boundary conditions that explain how CSR practices affect job applicants' propensity to apply for a job. Gond *et al.* (2017) specifically mentioned, “To continue to advance micro-CSR studies, further research needs to provide integrative analyses of the drivers of CSR and the boundary conditions and mechanisms underlying individual reactions to CSR” (p. 226).

Responding to such calls, the present study suggests the role of CSR credibility as a mediator and CEO activism (Hambrick and Wowak, 2019) as a moderator to CSR fit and organizational attractiveness relationship. We assert that CSR fit increases CSR's credibility, and CEO activism moderates this relationship. In recent times CEOs have become more outspoken (Chatterji and Toffel, 2019) and have taken a stance on social issues through CEO activism, irrespective of such issues were congruent with the nature of the business which they head. We assert that organizations having activist CEOs could still invest in misfit CSR activities without adversely impacting the credibility of CSR initiatives and hence organization attractiveness for job applicants.

The paper contributes to the CSR and recruitment literature. Extending the micro-CSR perspective, our paper brings the notion of CSR fit, rather than only CSR, to influence CSR and organizational attractiveness relationship. Accordingly, the paper also introduces CEO activism that could influence CSR and organizational attractiveness relationship. Extant literature exploring CEO traits and CSR have explored factors such as responsible leadership (Schinzel, 2018). By incorporating CEO's ideological traits, the paper thus extends the boundaries of upper echelon theory (Hambrick, 2007). The paper also adds to recruitment literature by extending implications of CSR fit to the field of recruitment and exploring the underlying mechanism through which CSR fit influences organizational attractiveness.

The paper proceeds as follows. We first present the review of literature on CSR fit. The development of propositions follows this. Finally, we present the discussion and conclusion section.

## **Review of literature and development of propositions**

### *Antecedents and consequences of CSR*

Scholars have debated if managerial self-interest drives the motivation to engage in CSR (Moon, 2002) or if there are any altruistic concerns as well. Rollinson observed, “. . . it is always difficult to tell whether behaving ethically towards external stakeholders is prompted by altruism or self-preservation” (Rollinson, 2002, p. 44). Corporate motives driving CSR generally include positive corporate image management or workforce integration, though altruistic motives also exist for managers. Workforce management issues imply integration and acceptance of the business into the local community. Rather Kell and Ruggie (2001, p. 326) attributed “the corporate interest in business ethics and good citizenship” to the necessity for firms to be able to integrate “the increasing number of diverse cultures of their officers and employees.” Moon (2002, p. 396) also attributed CSR to recruitment issues to create employer brand by virtue of investing in the community's economic development.

CSR has a positive outcome on several stakeholders. For instance, job seekers perceive organizations with strong CSR practices as more attractive employment options (Christensen *et al.*, 2014; Kim and Parke, 2011). Similarly, CSR positively influences a firm's corporate reputation, reduces risk perceptions, and enhances customer trust and loyalty (Stanwick and Stanwick, 1998). Investment in CSR activities has also positively influenced a firm's financial performance (Jin and Drozdenko, 2010). Given CSR can positively influence job applications, in this article, we explore in detail how CSR fit influences job applicants.

### *Job advertisements*

In recruitment advertisement, information on several organizational attributes is provided, which helps job candidates to assess organizational attractiveness. This is because limited information

about the company through the job advertisements mentioned attributes signal to applicants' information about what organization is likely to be (Barnett, 2007; Barnett and Salomon, 2012; Minor and Morgan, 2011; Uggerslev *et al.*, 2012). CSR information is also one such attribute that can help candidates interpret what an organization is and thus set its employer brand image (De Roeck and Delobbe, 2012; Gully *et al.*, 2013). CSR information enhances familiarity with the firms amongst job applicants (Kim and Parke, 2011; Turban and Greening, 1997). Extant research in experimental studies rendered information on CSR in mainly three ways. First, by providing organizational CSR ratings, as evaluated by external third-party rating agencies. Second, by capturing CSR policy statement and third, by depicting CSR information on any particular dimension such as a firm's environmental responsiveness (Guerci *et al.*, 2016; Jones *et al.*, 2014), or gender diversity and women empowerment (Greening and Turban, 2000; Martins and Parsons, 2007).

### *CSR fit*

Micro-CSR refers to "the study of the effects and experiences of CSR on individuals (in any stakeholder group) as examined at the individual level of analysis" (Rupp and Mallory, 2015). Scholars at different times have categorized CSR fit in different ways. For instance, Yuan *et al.* (2011) categorized CSR fit as internal versus external consistency. *Internal consistency* referred to the fit between CSR and organization activities, and *external consistency* implied the extent to which CSR met external stakeholders' expectations. Simmons and Becker-Olsen (2006) categorized CSR fit as natural and created fit. *Natural fit* referred to fit between organization activities and CSR. In contrast, *created fit* emphasized communication activities' role to create a linkage between CSR and organization, intending to mitigate negative fit. Bigne' Alcan~iz *et al.* (2012, 2010) distinguished between image versus functional and image

fit, where *image fit* referred to the similarity between CSR and brand image of the product line. In contrast, *functional fit* implied the linkage between CSR and core organization activities.

Similarly, substantive versus symbolic CSR is yet another classification of CSR. In *substantive CSR*, firms aim their activities at societal benefits, whereas in *symbolic CSR*, firms confine their CSR activities to fulfill legal needs (Donia *et al.*, 2017). From a recruitment perspective, researchers have not explored the impact of these fits on organizational attractiveness. However, Donia and Tetrault Sirsly (2016) conducted a study on employees with symbolic versus substantive CSR, where employees responded to substantive CSR more positively than to symbolic CSR.

In this paper, we refer to CSR fit as the similarity between a firm's core activity and CSR activity. A firm's core activities always create some adverse impact on society, such as firms in the automobile industry or paper industry damage the environment by releasing toxins in water and air. In hotels and restaurants, wastage of food is always a problem. Though all CSR activities are of social importance, a firm must first rectify its adverse impact on society rather than add advantages. This is likely to make stakeholders believe that the firm is more sincere about CSR and is not doing it for impression management (Beale and Fernando, 2009). Thus, certain industry-specific activities, such as those in the paper, metal, and chemical processing sectors, require more environmentally active CSR due to the potential adverse effect of firms' operating in these industries on the environment (Bowen, 2000; Hoffman, 1999). Similarly, firms operating in the tobacco or alcoholic drink industry create adverse health impacts. Therefore, they should pursue a more congruent CSR by focusing on health-specific CSR activities (Brammer and Pavelin, 2006).

We assert cue consistency theory can best assert the significance of CSR fit (Anderson, 1981). According to the *cue consistency theory*, the interpretation an individual draws from a cue depends upon the accompanying cues presented along with the focal cues. A set of cues is *consistent* if an individual feels that all cues agree with the judged attribute. On the contrary, a set of cues is *inconsistent* if the inferences from a particular set of cues contradict another subset of cues (Anderson, 1981). The theory has significant implications for CSR information in recruitment advertisements. Job applicants referring to an advertisement receive cues about a firm's nature and its core activities, such as a pharmaceutical firm being into drug manufacturing or a software firm into services of developing software. Through CSR information, they also receive cues about a firm's social responsiveness, such as environmental CSR activities or other altruistic activities. When CSR cue coincides with a firm's nature of operations, schema congruency is created as job applicants feel that CSR activity resonates with the firm's activities, resulting in cue consistency and hence positive evaluation of the organization. Thus, if a restaurant donates free food to the needy, CSR cues would be consistent with the firm's nature of operations. When CSR cue does not coincide with the nature of a firm's business activities, more cognitive elaboration of the multiple cues occurs, making extrinsic motives of CSR more salient and thus weakening positive reaction towards the organization (Du *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, when an automobile manufacturer makes philanthropic donations to non-profits, cue inconsistency results, as congruent CSR would be to reduce environmental pollution. Furthermore, high fit or congruence also makes the CSR activities more self-explanatory and thus raise lesser critical questions on firms' intrinsic motives of CSR.

Overall, when a CSR cause fits the firm's product line or operations, individuals can more easily integrate the information in their cognitive structures (Becker-Olsen *et al.*, 2006) and



developing a positive attitude towards the firm. Thus, such CSR activities are judged more positively as they appear to be more structured and stable to stakeholders having a clear linkage with the organization. Hence, we propose the following:

*P1.* When CSR information is in fit with core operations, job applicants have higher organizational attractiveness relative to when there is a misfit between CSR and the nature of business.

#### *Mediating role of CSR credibility*

*CSR credibility* refers to how credible the stakeholders perceive a firm's CSR involvement (Lee *et al.*, 2019). It reflects the CSR-related dimension of corporate credibility. When firms communicate their CSR initiatives, stakeholders often consider them greenwashing and not credible (Romenti *et al.*, 2013). Thus, given the wide variety of CSR activities, firms should be selective about which activity they want to provide information about in recruitment advertisements. When a firm publicizes CSR activity that is not related to its core business, stakeholders might perceive it as greenwashing or impression management tactics, similar to symbolic CSR (Aqueveque and Encina, 2010; Cartwright and Holmes, 2006). Thus, an organization must pick those CSR activities relevant to its business or core activities (Menon and Kahn, 2003; Nan and Heo, 2007), enhancing the credibility perception of the CSR.

On the contrary, little congruence between a business and social issue might make job applicants feel that an organization is engaged in CSR to gain only a positive reputation or impression (Go and Bortree, 2017), thus reducing overall organization attractiveness. According to the source credibility theory, more credible sources can exert better persuasive power than less credible ones (Hovland *et al.*, 1953; Sternthal *et al.*, 1978). CSR fit information is likely to have more persuasive power because CSR fit information is more credible than misfit or incongruent

information. Thus, congruent or CSR fit information has more favorable power to signal CSR's credibility than misfit CSR, resulting in the organization's positive evaluation. Hence, we propose the following:

*P2a.* For a job applicant, CSR fit information will increase the CSR credibility of an organization compared to CSR misfit.

*P2b.* The CSR credibility of an organization enhances the organizational attractiveness to a job applicant.

*P2c.* CSR credibility of an organization mediates the CSR fit and organizational attractiveness relationship.

#### *Moderating role of CEO activism*

Empirical research on CSR fit in management literature indicates that it had positive effects on relevant stakeholders (Ham and Han, 2012; Han *et al.*, 2013; Kim and Lee, 2012; Koschate-Fischer *et al.*, 2012). However, under certain contextual conditions such as poor organization reputation, CSR fit could not prevent a firm from the negative evaluation (Ellen *et al.*, 2000; Kim, 2011). Similarly, when consumers perceive an organization's moral tone as genuine, they reward a misfit CSR as well (Chernev and Blair, 2015). This implies that the impact of CSR fit/misfit on organization evaluation may vary with contingency factors—one such important contingency factor in CEO activism.

According to the cue consistency theory, interpretation, a person gives to a particular cue depends upon the values depicted by accompanying cues (Anderson, 1981). Individuals consider a set of cues consistent if they feel that the cues all agree in their implications for the judged attributes. A set of cues is *inconsistent* if the inferences made from a subset of these cues contradict the implications of another subset of cues (De Roeck *et al.*, 2016). When a set of cues

is consistent, each cue is combined to determine a resultant judgment of which the person is quite confident. To reconcile contradictory information, individuals could doubt the reliability of the cues. Alternatively, the individuals might resolve the inconsistency by focusing on some consistent subset of the inconsistent cues or by looking to previously ignored cues for confirmation or clarification (Ong *et al.*, 2018). This is especially relevant for incongruent CSR. Cue consistency theory suggests that job applicants can rely on multiple cues from the organizational context to assess different information's congruency, thus influencing their beliefs and attitude towards information (Slovic, 1966). Thus, building on cue consistency theory (Anderson, 1981; Maheswaran and Chaiken, 1991; Slovic, 1966), we assert that the presence of information on CEO activism would enhance the genuineness of intentions of the firm for CSR (Chernev and Blair, 2015). This drives the negative effect of CSR misfit down and enhancing the impact of fit on organization attractiveness.

Although the term CEO activism is relatively new, the concept was introduced by Donald David, the Dean of Harvard business school, in 1949, through his article “Business Responsibilities in an Uncertain World” (David, 1949). In this article, David urged the CEOs to take a stance on social issues as well, even if they are outside the firm's economic interest. As CSR fit activities are circumvented around those activities where an organization has vested economic interest, the CEO’s participation on non-economic issues through activism could have significant implications for the impact of CSR fit and misfit on organizational attractiveness.

CEOs across several companies have recently started taking a stand on social issues, ranging from expressing an opinion to sometimes even taking action on the issue. For example, after the Stoneman Douglas High School, Parkland, Florida, shooting incident on February 14, 2018, organizations such as Walmart and Delta Air Lines stopped giving any special deals to

National Rifle Association members (Associated Press, 2018). Media sources believed that members of the NRA were involved in the Stoneman Douglas High School shooting.

Similarly, when Indiana passed the Religious Freedom Restoration Act in 2015, which granted corporate freedom to discriminate against consumers based on their sexual orientation, CEOs of certain companies raised their concerns. For example, the CEO of Salesforce.com tweeted the companies plan to cancel its upcoming event in Indiana, even if it caused a business loss (Nobel, 2016). Though Salesforce.com's core business was not affected or related to the Religious Freedom Restoration Act's passage, the CEO decided to take action on the social cause. Thus, CEOs are not ethically or morally bound to respond to such issues. Yet, their voice and action on such matters imply that their organization exists for a purpose beyond economic profits. Such a stance raises CSR campaigns' effectiveness even if they are incongruent with core business activities, as stakeholders believe that organizations invest in such activities for benevolent reasons and not self-gain reasons through publicity. In a survey, it was found that CEO activism had a positive impact on employees, where 44% of employees stated that they would be more loyal to an organization that has a CEO as an activist (Munslow, 2018). Studies have also found customers indicating they were more willing to buy products from organizations whose CEOs openly share their viewpoints on socially relevant and controversial issues (Chatterji and Toffel, 2015). As CEO activism has positively influenced different stakeholders, it can also be expected to positively influence job applicants by enhancing the impact of CSR fit or diminishing the negative impact of CSR fit on organizational attractiveness for job applicants.

CEO activism could enhance CSR fit's impact as CEOs who are social activists are perceived as more caring about society's welfare at large and not just immediate stakeholders directly linked with the organization (Chatterji and Toffel, 2016). Moreover, the way job

applicants process information related to incongruent CSR is likely to change in the presence of CEO activism information. Thus, instead of equating a firm's responsiveness towards CSR as greenwashing or artificial, in case of CSR misfit, applicants may try to resolve the inconsistency and perceive that even if CSR is incongruent, it is probably a reflection of the CEOs genuine intention to add value to society, thus dampening the negative effect of incongruent CSR on organizational attraction. On the contrary, for a CSR fit condition, in the presence of CEO activism, applicants may perceive that not only the firm addresses CSR fit issues but covers an additional mile to address social issues, thus further enhancing their confidence in the organization, resulting in even more attraction towards the organization.

Overall, CEO activism could provide cues to potential job applicants that the organization is trying to balance various stakeholders' needs, thus enhancing CSR fit's impact on CSR credibility and lowering the adverse impact of a misfit on credibility, thus organization attractiveness. Hence, we propose the following:

*P4a.* CEO activism moderates the CSR fit and credibility relationship, such that the influence of CSR fit on CSR credibility is more positive when the CEO is an activist.

*P4b.* CEO activism moderates CSR misfit and credibility relationship such that the influence of CSR misfit on CSR credibility is less negative when the CEO is an activist.

In Figure 1 we present the conceptual framework:

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**Insert Figure 1 about here**

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## Discussion

The objective of this paper was to suggest how CSR fit influences job pursuit intention. We asserted that an applicant's attraction to an organization was likely to be impacted by CSR fit, rather than just advertising CSR in the job advertisement. In exploring the dynamics of this relationship, we also analyzed the underlying mechanism through which CSR fit influences organizational attractiveness to the potential job applicant. We also explained the role of boundary conditions influencing this relationship. In that context, we asserted that CSR credibility as a mediator of CSR fit organizational attractiveness relationship. Furthermore, CEO activism moderated the relationship between CSR fit and credibility. To date, only individual-level mediators such as perceived organization justice (Joo *et al.*, 2016) or perceived value fit, or organization fit between employer and job applicant or global CSR perception (Belinda *et al.*, 2018; Jones *et al.*, 2014) has been explored in the CSR literature. Very few studies explored organizational-level factors as mediators, such as corporate reputation (Wang, 2013). We assert that another vital organizational level mediator would be perceived CSR credibility that would cause CSR fit to impact job applicants' organizational attractiveness positively.

With regards to boundary conditions as set by moderators, the role of several moderators has been explored. This includes individual-level variables such as socio-environmental consciousness (Tsai *et al.*, 2014), CSR education of job applicant (Klimkiewicz and Oltra, 2017; Randy and Davis, 2011), moral identity (Rupp, 2011) or ethical disposition of employee (Zhang and Gowan, 2012) or amount of CSR information (Guerci *et al.*, 2016). We explore yet another organizational level factor, i.e., CEO activism as a moderator.

In the past few years, individual-level analysis of firms' CSR initiatives has gained tremendous attention giving rise to micro-CSR research (Gond *et al.*, 2017). Thus, organization

behavior and CSR scholars have started to explore individual-level reactions to CSR. However, here most studies have remained confined to responses by employees (Ng *et al.*, 2019; Opuku-Dakwa *et al.*, 2018; Rupp *et al.*, 2018), and relatively scant literature explore reactions of job applicants. Furthermore, in exploring cognitive and affective processes of CSR evaluations, most micro-CSR literature has focused on how individual-level psychological factors affect these responses. However, in the real world, stimuli are also provided by organizational level factors such as CSR credibility or CSR activism, which are cognitively processed by job applicants. In contrast to previous research, our propositions focus on these organizational-level factors while evaluating individual-level responses to firms' CSR initiatives.

One of the biggest challenges with CSR information in attracting job candidates is applicants' perceived genuinity about firms' interest in CSR. As CSR is used by some firms as a marketing gimmick or greenwashing, when a firm's CSR fits with its business activities, it enhances the CSR's credibility, thus enhancing organizations' attractiveness. Our assertions establish this underlying mechanism of credibility in enhancing organizational attractiveness among job applicants. This way, our propositions extend prior research where CSR credibility was found to positively influence stakeholders' willingness to participate in CSR activities (Lee *et al.*, 2019) or had a positive attitude towards CSR (Eberle *et al.*, 2013). Our findings are consistent with Ogunfowora *et al.* (2018), who found that individuals perceived CSR initiatives more positively for organizations with ethical CEOs.

Although the phenomenon of CEO activism is scantily explored (Hambrick and Wowak, 2019), we propose its significance in the context of CSR and organization attractiveness relationship. Our propositions thus extend CEO activism in the management literature, where

extant studies have explored the impact of CEO political ideology and attitude on firms' CSR practices (Chin *et al.*, 2013; Di Giuli and Kostovetsky, 2014).

### *Theoretical contributions*

First, our propositions contribute to micro-CSR literature. Though scant, literature largely focused on the impact of CSR activities on job applicants (Randy and Davis, 2011; Rupp *et al.*, 2013; Tsai *et al.*, 2014) limited attention was given to the impact of congruent versus incongruent CSR, i.e., CSR fit. By exploring CSR's impact on organizational attractiveness as perceived by job applicants, our assertions suggest a new lens for exploring CSR from job applicants' perspective.

Our research also complements previous "fit" research under various recruitment contexts such as person-organization fit (O'Reilly *et al.*, 1991) or person-job fit (Caldwell and O'Reilly, 1990). In this context, our research expands the understanding of CSR fit that could influence job applicants' organizational attractiveness. For instance, Jones *et al.* (2014) found that employees' perceived organization fit was high when organization CSR was attuned towards community care practices or environmental sustainability practices. However, they also asserted that it was not always the case. Our propositions in the paper assert that potential job applicants do not perceive this positively because of the lack of CSR fit with a firm's core business operations.

The second contribution of this article is to introduce the role of CSR credibility as an underlying mediating mechanism in the CSR-recruitment literature to explain job applicants' attitude towards CSR pursuing organizations. Overall, research on underlying mechanisms for the CSR-job applicant relationship has been scant (Jones *et al.*, 2014). For instance, Rupp *et al.* (2013) found that perceived justice through CSR activities mediated the relationship between CSR activities and job applicants' attraction. Rather, most scholars have focused on social identity and organizational identification as underlying mechanisms for CSR and job attraction relationship



(Gond *et al.*, 2017). Recently, studies have started untangling the mediation process through signaling functions (Behrend *et al.*, 2009; Guerci *et al.*, 2016). We extend this signaling stream of literature by proposing how CSR congruency with the nature of business signals the genuinity of CSR efforts, thus enhancing CSR initiatives' credibility, leading to a positive attitude of job applicants towards an organization. Relatedly our assertions also contribute to the recruitment literature. Extant literature has emphasized the role of trustworthiness in attracting job candidates (Klotz *et al.*, 2013). Our propositions suggest that CSR credibility enhances an organization's trustworthiness enhancing organizations' attractiveness towards job applicants.

Third, in terms of exploring boundary conditions, this research explores the role of CEO activism. We propose that it is valuable to examine CEO activism from the perspective of job applicants. As such, the role of CEO activism in the management literature remains scantily explored (Branicki *et al.*, 2020). We assert that CEO activism is valuable from the job applicants' perspective. This way, we also extend integrated literature on the upper echelon and CSR in the context of recruitment (Gupta *et al.*, 2017). Based on cue consistency theory, we specifically show that CEOs' personal views on several political and sociological issues diminish the negative impact of CSR incongruency on its credibility and hence organizational attractiveness for job aspirants. Thus, we suggest a new contingency variable that would be relevant for researchers interested in examining micro-CSR literature from job applicants' and employees' perspectives.

Our study also adds to the CEO value literature where CEO personal values and political ideologies influence organizational outcomes such as the cultural orientation of the organization (Berson *et al.*, 2008) or organizational efficiency (Aktaş *et al.*, 2011) and even attributes such as CSR engagement by the firm (Chin *et al.*, 2013). Our findings extend this literature by depicting the moderating impact of CEO values on CSR through CEO activism.

### *Managerial implications*

Recruiters should consider mentioning not only the CSR activities but CSR fit activities as they advertise for the job vacancy. Merely advertising an organization as one is socially responsible to its stakeholders may not attract high-quality applicants, especially if the CSR mentioned is not aligned with the firm's core activities. Rather, mentioning CSR may backfire, as potential job candidates may perceive the genuinity of CSR with skepticism if the CSR is not in fit with core operations of the firm. Thus, recruiters should highlight those CSR in job advertisements congruent with the firm's core operations. Recruiters should also consider describing activist activities taken by the CEO of the firm. As CEOs take a stand on social issues, it could increase CSR activities' credibility when those activities are in fit with the organization's core operations. Description of CEO activism could also mitigate the effect of the reduced credibility on organizational attraction when CSR is not in fit with the firm's core operations. Overall, we assert that it is not CSR but CSR fit that may become a source of competitive advantage for a firm by enhancing organizational attractiveness among quality job applicants. We do not assert that organizations should restrict CSR to the core activities of the firm. We only assert that to increase the credibility of CSR, where it is generally considered as “greenwashing” by society at large, organizations can maximize the utility of their CSR investments by selectively describing information about those CSR activities in recruitment brochures and on their web sites that are congruent with core operations of the firm. Companies can further enhance their “socially responsible image by mentioning information on their activist CEO. As a corollary, CEOs should also intend to become activists and speak on social issues if they want to have a competitive advantage by attracting quality and potential job applicants. Rather, CEOs can mitigate the effect of incongruent CSR among job applicants if they take a stand on social issues.

## *Conclusion*

This paper presented a conceptual model linking CSR fit and organizational attractiveness. Extending previous researchers where researchers explored CSR's impact on organizational attractiveness as gauged by job applicants, our research suggests that credibility of CSR information in job advertisements and hence organizational attractiveness could be increased when CSR is in fit rather than misfit with core activities of the organization. Then leveraging on CEO activism, which is very contemporary in the field of management (Hambrick and Wowak, 2019), we explained how the positive influence of CSR fit and negative impact of CSR misfit on CSR credibility, and hence organizational attractiveness could be managed. Our paper has theoretical and practical value where managers could attract potent job applicants by providing CSR fit, rather than misfit information.

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**Figure 1. Conceptual Model**

