



Corporate social responsibility propaganda and employer attractiveness: moderating effects of compensation level and corporate integrity level

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Abstract

Increasing numbers of companies have added corporate social responsibility (CSR) propaganda into their recruitment activities. Research about whether CSR propaganda can improve employer attractiveness has not been thoroughly discussed yet. Therefore, based on signal theory and social identity theory, the relationship between CSR propaganda and employer attractiveness is examined in this paper. Furthermore, the moderating effects of compensation level between CSR propaganda and employer attractiveness are analyzed based on elaboration likelihood model. The moderating effects of integrity level between CSR propaganda and employer attractiveness are analyzed based on halo effect. Experimental data from a sample of 112 seniors are used as well as variance analysis is adopted to test the hypotheses. The result shows that CSR propaganda has a positive effect on employer attractiveness. Corporate integrity can consolidate the positive relationship between CSR propaganda and employer attractiveness. When corporate compensation level is high, CSR propaganda has nothing to do with employer attractiveness. When corporate compensation level is low, CSR propaganda will contribute to increasing employer attractiveness. This paper can expand the theoretical application of CSR propaganda in the field of human resource management and make a guiding contribution to corporate to attract talents for CSR propaganda.

Keywords Corporate social responsibility propaganda · Employer attractiveness · Compensation level · Integrity level

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1 Introduction

After years of extensive development at the expense of the environment, the sustainable development has become an unavoidable hot issue, and has been promoted to a strategic level by most firms. The introduction of United Nations (UN) Agenda 2030 with 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 marked the awareness of the sustainable hand has increased in all circles. As an invisible hand, sustainability was first defined as the development that can meet the needs of contemporary people without endangering the ability of future generations to meet their needs (Brundtland, 1987). As the way and support for the corporate sustainable development, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has gradually become the focus of public attention (Enyoghasi & Badurdeen, 2021). In order to publicize the positive corporate image to external stakeholders, release benign signals, and reduce the asymmetry of internal and external information, more and more firms began to actively undertake CSR and take the initiative to propaganda CSR (Skard & Thorbjørnsen, 2014). Academia pays attention to the influence of CSR on firm performance (Huynh et al., 2022; Hasan et al., 2022; Ellili & Nobanee, 2022; Zhu et al., 2014).

Besides product, craft, patent, capital market, economies of scale, learning curve (Greening & Turban, 2000), obtaining value from knowledge assets has become the key to the success of firms with the arrival of new economy era (Van Opstal & Hugé, 2013). Therefore, how to recruit high-quality employees is an important part of building firms' competitiveness. With the extensive attention to environmental and social issues, CSR begins to appear in recruitment information (Ganesan et al., 2018; Ehnert, 2009). However, extant research still emphasizes the effect of firm information (Obaid, 2015; Williamson et al., 2010; Cable & Turban, 2001), recruitment channels (Banerjee & Gupta, 2019; Evertz et al., 2021; Meliciani & Radicchia, 2011; Collins & Han, 2004) and other factors in the recruitment process.

Modern firms are no longer just aiming at maximizing profits, but also need to take into account the multiple engagement of stakeholders such as customers, employees, shareholders, and job seekers. Stakeholder engagement refers to the practices that an organization undertakes to involve stakeholders in a positive manner in organizational activities (Greenwood, 2007). In the domain of CSR research, the engagement of job seekers is still neglected. In fact, CSR can reduce employment costs and improve job seekers' satisfaction and loyalty, which is of profound significance to job seekers, who are important stakeholders (Klimkiewicz & Oltra, 2017; Zhang & Gowan, 2012). Extant research is far from strategy support to firm recruitment in the context of sustainable development.

Stakeholders' cognition and attitude toward CSR propaganda are not static and may be adjusted by changing external clues. Generally speaking, the level of corporate integrity, an external clue of a firm, can directly affect the trust of job seekers in corporate information disclosure. Job seekers can't rule out the exaggerated and untrue parts in the recruitment information (Schuler & Cording, 2006). Good corporate integrity will stimulate job seekers' trust and make CSR propaganda more trustworthy. Therefore, based on elaboration likelihood model, this study added corporate integrity level as a moderating variable into the research framework. In addition, the basic material conditions in the recruitment process play an important role in forming employer attractiveness. Compensation is the basic material factor for individuals to make a living (Berthon et al., 2005). Therefore, based on halo effect, this study combined corporate compensation level as a moderating variable into the study framework.

Considering the research gap, this paper focuses on two questions: (1) Does CSR influence employers' attractiveness in the talent market? Considering that recruitment information is self-reported by firms, this question is analyzed from the perspective of CSR propaganda. (2) In what conditions does CSR influence firms' attractiveness? In order to answer this question, two moderating variables are considered, compensation level and integrity level. The potential contributions of this paper are as follows. (1) In contrast to earlier findings, this study focuses on CSR propaganda, a recruitment strategy that firms can adopt. Based on signal theory and social identity theory, this paper introduces the classic "symbolic-instrumental benefits" framework in the marketing field, constructs a research model of "CSR propaganda- employer attractiveness", bridges the field of CSR and human resource management, and provides guidance for firms, industry, and academia. (2) Firms have great autonomy in CSR propaganda, and negative information won't be disclosed in the propaganda (Schuler & Cording, 2006). Meanwhile, the corporate information that job seekers are exposed to during recruitment is very important. Considering the research context, the integrity level and the compensation level are combined in the research model. Based on elaboration likelihood model and halo effect, this paper introduces both tangible characteristics (compensation level) and intangible characteristics (integrity level) of firms and expands the boundary conditions of the relationship between CSR propaganda and employer attractiveness, making this research model more comprehensive and rigorous. It provides practical implications on how to use CSR propaganda to improve employer attractiveness considering firms' actual conditions (such as integrity level and compensation level).

In order to verify the hypotheses in the paper, experimental method is used and the experimental materials are distributed among Chinese students. Considering the following reasons China is selected as the research context. (1) With the intensified competition among firms, the competition for talents is becoming fiercer. Talents wars have swept China since 2017, when Wuhan took the lead in taking measures to attract talents. Such measures as start-up subsidies, house purchase subsidies, have been initiated in big cities to attract talents. How to attract talents has become an important issue for firms. (2) After years of extensive development at the expense of the environment, CSR behavior has gradually become the focus of the Chinese government and the public. In this case, firms need to be socially responsible, or at least appear to be so, in order to meet public demand. Considering the above two reasons, the research on social responsibility propaganda and employer attractiveness is particularly prominent in the Chinese context.

2 Hypotheses

2.1 The main effect of CSR propaganda on employer attractiveness

Employer attractiveness refers to an individual's attitude toward the company as an employer and is expressed as the potential benefits gained from working in the company (Berthon et al., 2005). The potential benefits include instrumental benefits (objective profit for job seekers) and symbolic benefits (positive social status through membership) (Highhouse et al., 2007). Employer attractiveness is a critical construct that can influence a job seeker's application decision in the recruitment process (Evertz et al., 2019).

Considering the following reasons we posit that companies with high social responsibility are more attractive in the job market. Firstly, socially responsible companies bring

instrumental benefits to job seekers. Extant studies have confirmed that companies with social responsibility are more inclined to treat employees fairly, provide better security measures for employees and enable employees to gain dignity (Puncheva-Michelotti et al., 2018). Secondly, socially responsible companies satisfy job seekers' desire for symbolic benefits. Social identity theory holds that members in a particular social group form self-cognitions to some extent (Liao & Cheng, 2020). Being a member of a high-quality social group can boost an individual's self-esteem (Jetten et al., 2015). Therefore, a positive employer image can enhance employees' self-awareness. Job seekers prefer companies with positive green images (Nejati & Ahmad, 2015), because working in such companies can bring them a higher social status.

Job seekers cannot get all information about the potential employer, and they can only make their job decision by the fragmented and scattered information (Kumari & Saini, 2018). Signal theory argues that job seekers will use various channels to gather information to predict the potential employers' future behaviors (Ganesan et al., 2018). That is, the recruitment propaganda of companies is of vital importance. Several studies have revealed that recruitment information released by companies plays an indispensable role in attracting job seekers (Walker et al., 2012). To attract competitive employees, companies such as Microsoft, General Motors and IBM have added information about CSR to their recruitment brochures (Greening & Turban, 2000). Based on the above analysis, we posit that:

H1 CSR propaganda helps to enhance employer attractiveness.

2.2 The moderating effect of compensation level and integrity level on employer attractiveness

Elaboration likelihood model considers that the attitudes of information receivers not only depend on the core information presented by the information provider, but also will be affected by the peripheral clues related to the information (Li, 2013). Therefore, beyond recruitment information provided by recruiters, information from other sources gathered by job seekers (whether intentionally or accidentally) will influence the decision that the job seekers make (Shahab et al., 2021). Generally speaking, job seekers will strive to gather information about the company before making a choice. Chances are that they have not only read the employers' recruitment information, but also have browsed information about the company from other sources knowingly/unwittingly. Since the information provided by recruiters is self-reported, it needs no inspection by other organizations and inevitably includes exaggerated or false elements (Ganesan et al., 2018). At this moment, this peripheral information will have an impact on the job seeker's decision.

The positive external cues that job seekers receive contribute to making employers more attractive. The integrity level of the company is one of the important peripheral features. Extant studies in the capital market show that the integrity level will affect investors' evaluation of companies (Thayer, 2011). Although the talent market and the capital market belong to two-factor markets, they are the key resources that companies need to compete. Companies are supposed to obtain resources in the factor market to enhance their competitive advantages. Therefore, we further propose:

H2 Corporate integrity level moderates the impact of CSR propaganda on employer attractiveness, *ceteris paribus*. When companies have high integrity levels, CSR propaganda can

attract job seekers. For others with low integrity levels, no matter how the CSR propaganda levels are, they are not attractive to job seekers.

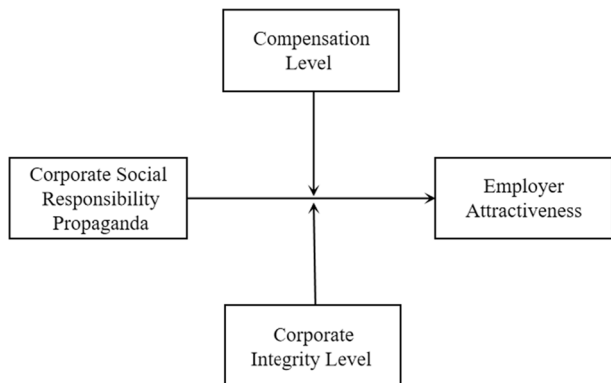
Halo effect holds that people always divide things into “good” or “bad” and form a specific cognitive inference (benign or bad) according to this division (Cooper et al., 2018). To the observers, if there is a prominent attribute of the evaluated object (that is, halo attribute), their understanding of the object’s other aspects will be affected (Jin & Li, 2019). As long as observers’ cognition of the prominent attribute is positive, they will leave a positive impression on the whole cognitive object (Sundar & Kardes, 2015).

Compensation refers to various forms of remuneration obtained by employees by providing services to employers. Compensation is a monetary symbol in form, and it is closely related to the immediate interests of employees, which can affect the individual’s evaluation of the employers (Coombas & Holladay, 2006). First, based on the halo effect, the description of post-compensation is an indispensable part of recruitment information. This key information will affect the overall impression of the observers (job seekers) on the evaluated object (employers), which stimulates the evaluation of the overall ability of the employers (Watermann et al., 2021). Second, emphasized the positive influence of compensation on job seekers in their research related to employer attractiveness. Higher compensation is a “halo” attribute of employers for job seekers. Third, generally speaking, compared with ordinary firms, job seekers are more likely to think that higher-paying firms are always with higher economic performance, better employee welfare systems and stronger organizational ability (Carlini et al., 2019). Based on the good impression of high compensation, job seekers tend to consider that such employers have enough strength to fulfill CSR so as to trust the CSR propaganda in recruitment information and be attracted (Jones et al., 2014). So, we further posit that:

H3 Compensation level moderates the influence of CSR propaganda on employer attractiveness, *ceteris paribus*. When the compensation reaches a certain level, the active CSR propaganda helps to enhance the job seeking intentions of candidates.

The conceptual model of this paper is shown in Fig. 1.

Fig. 1 Conceptual model



3 Research methodology

3.1 Manipulation experiment and variable design

Manipulation experiment has the advantages of purposefully manipulating independent variables, eliminating the interference of factors (such as corporate scale and performance), capturing the Instantaneous response of subjects and easily combining with other research methods (such as questionnaire and interview) (Ma et al., 2022). Therefore, the manipulation experiment is a suitable way to verify the study framework.

In order to verify the impact of CSR propaganda on employer attractiveness, the information of CSR is presented in company recruitment brochure, while there was no social responsibility propaganda in the recruitment brochure of control group. Mimicking the recruitment information of some well-known companies, the social responsibility propaganda messages were designed. Referring to Carroll (1993), the messages include four dimensions, economics, law, morality, and charity. The descriptive words were as follows ‘In 2019, we achieved a total profit of 50 million CHY, a substantial growth compared with last year. We have been strictly observed business ethics, adhered to the cooperation principle of fair, open and just, and maintained close cooperative relations with our trading partners. We also focus on the sustainable development of society, promote environmental management throughout the company, pay attention to the environmental risk assessment of suppliers, and refuse to collaborate with high-polluting manufacturers. At the same time, our company spares no effort to give back to society. In 2019, the company donated more than 5 million CHY for poverty alleviation, school aid, disaster relief, community services, and other public welfare undertakings.’

Besides the introduction of the company, the compensation information of the vacancy was also presented in the recruitment brochure in order to test its moderating effect of compensation level. The information provided by the high-level group was: ‘The compensation will be 20% above the industry average level with an excellent benefits package. Employees also enjoy a generous compensation increase policy.’ The information provided by the low-level group is ‘The company will provide you with industry average compensation.’

In order to verify the moderating effect of integrity level, we added supplementary information in the recruitment brochure. The following descriptions were used to describe the high integrity level in the experimental materials: ‘Suppose that you happen to see some external reports about this company recently, with the subject content as follows: this company has won the honor of “Honest Enterprise” in 2019.’ For the low-level group, it was described as ‘Suppose that you happen to read some recent external reports about the company. The subject is: the company is recently sued by creditors over its debt.’

The dependent variable in the study was employer attractiveness. Referring to Zhang and Gowan (2012), there were three questions at the end of the experimental materials: ‘I would like to work for this company.’ ‘This company is attractive to me.’ and ‘I will take this company as my first choice when looking for a job’.

The participants were asked to give the answers on a seven-point scale. Table 1 lists the variable names and assignment methods involved in this study.

Table 1 Variable name and assignment

Variables	Name	Assignment	Scale level
Dependent variable	Employer attractiveness	Measured by a 7-point Likert scale from 1 to 7: strongly disagree = 1, strongly agree = 7	Quantitative
Independent variable	CSR propaganda	With = 1, Without = 2	Nominal
Moderator variable	Integrity level	Low = 1, High = 2	Nominal
	Compensation level	Low = 1, High = 2	Nominal
Demographic characteristics	Gender	Female = 1, Male = 2	Nominal
	Age	Age	Nominal
	Job-hunting experience	Without = 1, With = 2	Nominal

3.2 Manipulation analysis

Before the formal experiment, the researchers conducted a pilot experiment. The propaganda materials were distributed to 10 peer researchers. They were invited to read and evaluate the 'corporate integrity level' and 'corporate compensation level' of the materials on the 7-level scale. The means of 'high integrity' and 'low integrity' were 5.171 and 3.153, respectively, and the p -value was 0.003. The means of 'high compensation' and 'low compensation' were 5.913 and 3.552, respectively, and the p -value corresponding to the t -test was 0.012. It indicated that the levels of the above two variables could be successfully manipulated in the experiment.

3.3 Experiment design

The independent variable and the two moderating variables involved in this study were taken to 2 different states, respectively, so a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ experimental design was adopted to form 8 simulated scenarios. The background information about the company was exactly the same except that the above three variables were at different states. The recruitment brochures were printed and randomly assigned to the job seekers at the job fairs organized by Shandong University of Science and Technology. The subjects were asked to rate the employer attractiveness after reading the scenarios in the recruitment brochures. Sixteen participants were excluded due to their incomplete information. Finally, 112 valid samples entered the data analysis stage. Their demographic characteristics are shown in Table 2.

As the dependent variable employer attractiveness was measured by a scale, which included 3 items (Zhang & Gowan, 2012), reliability test and validity test were needed. Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient was 0.897, which showed that the reliability of the scale was good (Bland & Altman, 1997). The KMO coefficient was 0.715. Factor analysis result showed that a common factor with an eigenvalue greater than one could be extracted, explaining 83.60% of the variation. The above results suggested that the employer attractiveness scale was eligible for the study requirements.

Table 2 Demographic characteristics

Variables	Number	Percentage (%)	Cumulative percentage (%)
Gender			
Male	22	19.64	19.64
Female	90	80.36	100.00
Age			
20	2	1.79	1.79
21	50	44.64	46.43
22	12	10.71	100.00
23	12	10.71	100.00
Job-hunting experience			
With	82	73.21	73.21
Without	30	26.79	100

4 Experiment

4.1 Experiment 1: the direct effect of CSR propaganda

The questionnaires are divided into two portions, including the propaganda with CSR and the propaganda without CSR, and two sets of data were obtained. In the case of CSR propaganda, the mean of employer attractiveness is 4.660, and the standard deviation is 1.427. In the absence of CSR propaganda, the mean of employer attractiveness is 3.891, and the standard deviation is 1.322. A two-sample t-test was conducted, and the P-value is 0.004. It could be argued that at the significance level of 0.01, the group with CSR propaganda is more attractive to job seekers. H1 was supported.

In this study, the optimal scale regression is used to study the influence of CSR propaganda on employer attractiveness. SPSS25.0 is also used for data analysis. The optimal scale regression adheres to the principle of iterative equation optimization, converts the original variables into quantitative scores, and then uses these appropriate quantitative scores to replace the original variables for regression analysis. This method allows nominal variables and numerical variables to exist simultaneously, which breaks through the restriction of discrete variables on the choice of analytical models. It is a suitable research method for the empirical research (Ouyang et al., 2013).

The results of optimal scale regression are shown in Table 2. After gender, age, and job-hunting experience were put into Model 1 as control variables, CSR propaganda was added into Model 2. The statistical results show that CSR propaganda significantly affects employer attractiveness ($F=4.779$, $p=0.001$; $\beta=0.215$, $p<0.01$), supporting H1 (Table 3).

This study further analyzes the variables included in model 2. Table 4 lists the tolerance value, standard coefficient, F value, and importance of each variable. First, tolerance indicates the proportion of the variable's influence on the dependent variable that cannot be explained by other variables. The tolerance values of all variables before and after conversion are greater than 0.9, which indicates that there is no multicollinearity. Second, the statistical results in Table 4 show that job-hunting experience

Table 3 The results of optimal scale regression

Variables	Employer attractiveness	
	Model 1	Model 2
Gender	0.263**	0.196*
Job-hunting experience	0.176*	0.176*
Age	-0.172	-0.170*
CSR propaganda		0.215**
R^2	0.115	0.152
<i>Adjusted-R²</i>	0.091	0.120
ΔR^2		0.029
F	4.694	4.779
<i>Sig.</i>	0.004	0.001

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

($F = 6.280$, $p = 0.014$), gender ($F = 7.268$, $p = 0.008$), age ($F = 4.027$, $p = 0.047$), and CSR propaganda ($F = 5.573$, $P = 0.047$) have different degrees of significant impact on employer attractiveness. Third, the importance is the percentage of the importance of each variable in the model. The importance of all variables should add up to 100%. The larger the value, the more important the variable is to predict the dependent variable. The order of importance of the above variables in Model 2 is: CSR propaganda (0.331) > gender (0.316) > job-hunting experience (0.178) > age (0.175). Among them, the importance of CSR propaganda accounts for the highest proportion. Fourth, according to the standard partial regression coefficient (β) of these variables, the regression equation of model 2 can be obtained: employer attractiveness = $0.215 \times \text{CSR propaganda} + 0.196 \times \text{gender} + 0.175 \times \text{job-hunting experience} - 0.170 \times \text{age}$. From the coefficient weights of these variables, it can be concluded that CSR propaganda positively affects employer attractiveness. Fifth, Fig. 2 shows the quantitative scoring transformation of CSR propaganda. The quantitative score of the “with CSR propaganda” group on employer attractiveness is significantly higher than that of the “without CSR propaganda” group, which indicates that CSR propaganda is important to employer attractiveness, further confirming H1.

4.2 Experiment 2: the moderating effect of integrity level

The sample data are divided into four scenarios according to CSR propaganda level and integrity level. Descriptive statistical results of employer attractiveness are shown in Table 5.

In this study, the T -test was used to explore the influence of CSR propaganda and corporate integrity level on employer attractiveness, and SPSS25.0 was used for data analysis. The test results are shown in Table 6.

In the case of a low integrity level without CSR propaganda, the average of employer attractiveness is 3.125, and the variance is 0.849. In the case of low integrity level with CSR propaganda, the average of employer attractiveness is 3.282, and the variance is 1.093. The p -value of the t -test is 0.420 ($p = 0.678$), indicating that when the integrity level is low, CSR propaganda has no effect on employer attractiveness.

Table 4 Standard coefficient, correlation, and importance of each variable

Indices	Standard coefficient		F	p	Correlation		Importance	Tolerance		
	Beta	standard error			Zero order	Deviation		Portion	Before trans-formation	After trans-formation
Job-hunting Experience	0.175	0.070	6.280	0.014	0.154	0.186	0.174	0.178	0.991	0.986
Gender	0.196	0.083	5.573	0.020	0.244	0.202	0.190	0.316	0.941	0.935
Age	-0.170	0.084	4.027	0.047	-0.156	-0.181	-0.169	0.175	0.994	0.988
CSR propaganda	0.215	0.080	7.268	0.008	0.233	0.219	0.207	0.331	0.928	0.933

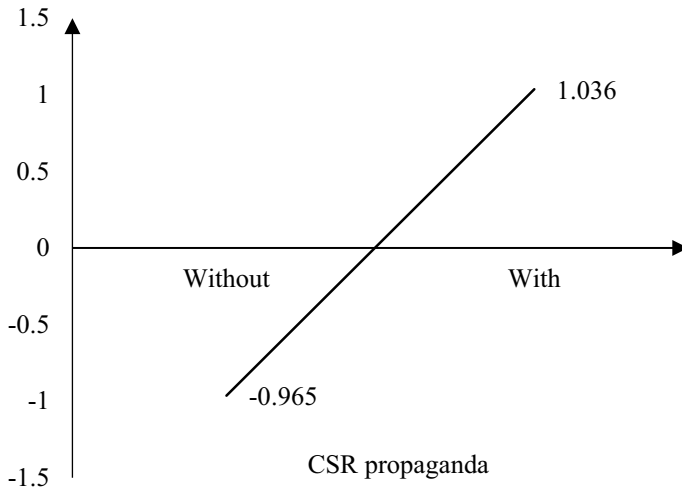


Fig. 2 The quantitative scoring transformation of CSR propaganda

Table 5 Descriptive statistical results of employer attractiveness

CSR propaganda			
Integrate level	High	Low	Average
High	5.385 (0.772) N=13	4.510 (0.687) N=13	4.886 (0.784) N=26
Low	3.282 (1.093) N=14	3.125 (0.849) N=16	3.195 (0.970) N=30
Average	4.333 (1.414) N=27	3.911 (1.145) N=29	4.107 (1.294) N=56
Compensation level			
High	5.289 (1.258) N=15	4.622 (1.060) N=15	5.289 (1.210) N=30
Low	4.590 (1.397) N=13	3.000 (1.438) N=13	3.795 (1.625) N=26
Average	4.964 (1.370) N=28	3.869 (1.489) N=28	4.417 (1.532) N=56

When the integrity level is high, and there's no CSR propaganda, the average of employer attractiveness is 4.510, and the variance is 0.687. In the case of high integrity with CSR propaganda, the average of employer attractiveness is 5.385, and the variance is

Table 6 Variance analysis results

	t	Sig. (2- tails)	Mean differ- ence	Std. error differ- ence	95% confi- dence interval of the differ- ence	
					Lower	Upper
With CSR propaganda VS Without CSR propaganda	2.937	0.004	0.770	0.262	0.250	1.289
With CSR propagandax low integrity vs. Without CSR propagandax low integrity	0.420	0.678	0.157	0.374	-0.924	0.610
With CSR propagandax high integrity vs. Without CSR propagandax high integrity	1.971	0.050	0.575	0.292	0.026	1.176
With CSR propagandax low compensation vs. Without CSR propagandax low compensation	2.747	0.011	1.590	0.579	2.784	0.395
With CSR propagandax high compensation vs. Without CSR propagandax high compensation	1.516	0.141	0.667	0.440	-1.567	0.234

1.971 ($p=0.050$), indicating that when the integrity level is high, CSR propaganda is conducive to improving employer attractiveness.

By comparing the above results of different integrity levels, it indicates that integrity level is the condition for CSR propaganda to play its role. The effect of CSR propaganda is different under different integrity levels. H2 was verified.

4.3 Experiment 3: the moderating effect of the compensation level

We divide the sample data into four groups according to the level of CSR propaganda and compensation level, and the results of descriptive statistics are shown in Table 5. The T-test was used to explore the influence of CSR propaganda and corporate compensation level on employer attractiveness, and SPSS25.0 was used for data analysis. The test results are shown in Table 6.

When the compensation level is low, and there is no CSR propaganda, the average of employer attractiveness is 3.000, and the variance is 1.438. In the case of low compensation with CSR propaganda, the average of employer attractiveness was 4.590, and the variance is 1.397. The t value is 0.2.747 ($p=0.011$). It indicates that CSR propaganda can improve employer attractiveness if the compensation of the company is low.

In the case of high compensation level without social responsibility propaganda, the average of employer attractiveness is 4.622, and the variance is 1.060. And the average and variance of employer attractiveness are 5.289 and 1.258, respectively, in the case of high company integrity with CSR propaganda. However, the p -value of the t -test is 1.516 ($p=0.141$), showing there is no significant difference between the two groups. It indicates that if the compensation level is high, the employer attractiveness has nothing to do with CSR propaganda. Comparing the results mentioned above, it was found that CSR propaganda was more effective when compensation is low, which was contrary to our expectations. H3 was not supported.

The moderating effect of integrity level is shown in Fig. 3. When the company integrity level is high, the CSR propaganda in recruitment brochure will help increase the employer

attractiveness. When the company integrity level is low, regardless of whether there is CSR propaganda, the employer attractiveness is low.

Figure 4 depicts the moderating effect of compensation level. When the compensation level is low, CSR propaganda can increase the employer attractiveness. When the compensation level is high, regardless of whether CSR propaganda is carried out, the employer attractiveness of the company is high.

5 Discussions

5.1 CSR propaganda and employer attractiveness

The processing, interpretation, and evaluation of social information by an individual will influence his (her) subsequent behavior (Dodge 2014). The information disseminated by CSR propaganda can reduce information asymmetry and communication barriers between job seekers and employers. If job seekers receive positive signals from CSR propaganda, they will process and analyze the signals based on their cognition, and be attracted by CSR propaganda. It is favorable for enhancing their job intention (Wang, 2013).

5.2 The moderating effect of integrity level

When the company integrity level is high, CSR propaganda helps to increase the employer attractiveness. According to elaboration likelihood model and halo effect, as a peripheral clue that is different from the core information of the company, the positive attribute of the integrity level positively affects job seekers' judgment. Job seekers extend their favorable opinion of the company integrity to CSR propaganda, believing that the relevant information of CSR propaganda is more credible, thus think the employer is more attractive.

The low company integrity level will damage the corporate reputation and the employer image, leading to the low-level credibility of CSR propaganda. Job seekers may be more inclined to treat CSR propaganda made by employers with a lack of integrity as instrumental propaganda, believing that its purpose is to cover up negative public opinions of companies, to win the recognition of society, the favor of consumers and the goodwill of the

Fig. 3 Moderating effect of integrity level

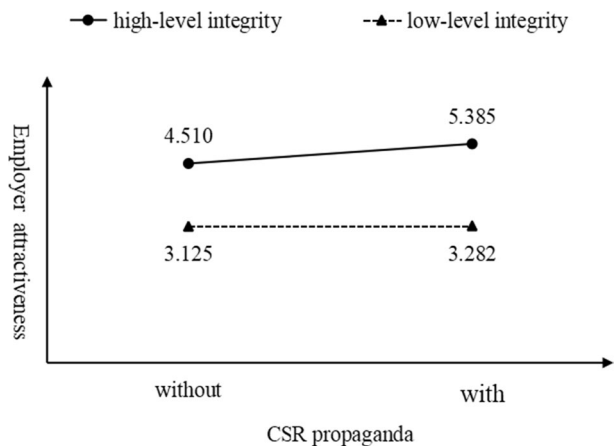
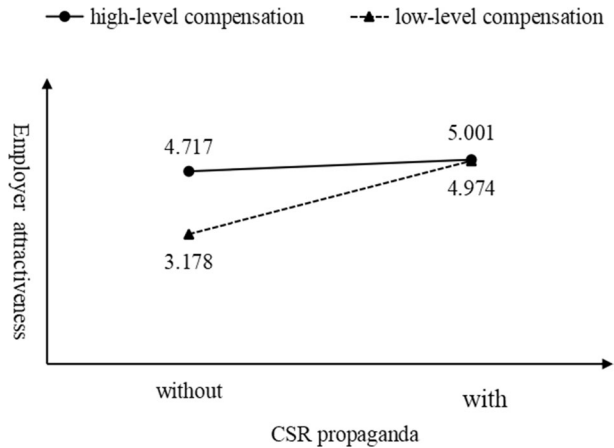


Fig. 4 Moderating effect of compensation level



government. Once the mismatch between CSR propaganda and integrity level is discovered and exposed, the credibility of companies will be damaged and the employer attractiveness will be further influenced. Therefore, no matter whether companies with low integrity carry out CSR propaganda, there is no difference in employer attractiveness.

5.3 The moderating effect of compensation level

CSR propaganda can make employers more attractive when the compensation level is low. When the compensation level is high, the employer attractiveness will have nothing to do with social responsibility propaganda. It should be noted that the low-level compensation in this study was defined as ‘industry average compensation’. According to the equity theory, job seekers concern not only about the absolute amount of compensation, but also about the relative amount of compensation. When the compensation is similar to that of other employees in the industry, it will be enough to meet the needs of job seekers and compensation satisfaction is achieved. Under the premise of achieving compensation satisfaction, the CSR propaganda is conducive to the establishment of corporate image, and can enhance employer attractiveness.

However, if the compensation level is high, the contribution of CSR propaganda to employer attractiveness is not significant. In this experiment, a high-level compensation was defined as ‘compensation 20% higher than the industry average’. At this time, the high compensation level of the company is a very shining and significant organizational feature, which is attractive enough to job seekers, while other factors contribute little. Therefore, the promotion of CSR propaganda does not contribute much to the employer attractiveness. This result indicates that money is still the most common reason for employees to choose a job, because money can bring them food, privilege and security.

6 Conclusions and implications

6.1 Conclusions

Based on the signal theory and social identity theory, the relationship between CSR propaganda and employer attractiveness is analyzed using experimental method. The

following conclusions are drawn: (1) CSR propaganda, as an important external feature of the employers, can convey to job seekers the signal of the functional benefits and symbolic benefits, positively affects employer attractiveness; (2) Based on the elaboration likelihood model, corporate integrity level can help job seekers to eliminate the exaggeration in CSR propaganda. when the company integrity level is high, the CSR propaganda will contribute to increasing the employer attractiveness; when the corporate integrity level is low, regardless of whether the CSR propaganda is carried out, the employer attractiveness is low; (3) Based on halo effect, the corporate compensation level is a distinctive attribute of the employers. When the company compensation level is low, the CSR propaganda will contribute to increasing the employer attractiveness; when the company compensation level is high, regardless of whether the CSR propaganda is carried out, the employer attractiveness level is high.

6.2 Implications

6.2.1 Implications for academia

Firstly, some scholars have proposed that CSR is conducive to the establishment of corporate image and corporate reputation (Kim et al., 2020; Arendt & Brettel, 2010; Lewis, 2003). However, in the field of CSR, there is a lack of empirical research on job seekers. As firms are more and more aware of the importance of talent, the research in the field of human resources has become hot. Previous studies mostly focus on the influence of job characteristic, career development, compensation, and other factors on job seekers, but seldom pay attention to the role of CSR propaganda in recruitment process. From the perspective of human resource management, this study investigates the responses of job seekers to CSR propaganda based on signal theory and social identity theory. The results show that the promotion of CSR is conducive to improving the employer attractiveness. This conclusion is of great significance to the research in the field of CSR and human resource management. It builds a bridge between CSR and human resource management, and makes up for the shortcomings of the existing research.

Secondly, this paper studies the moderating effect of the compensation level and the integrity level, which provides a new idea for improving the employer attractiveness. The result shows that the corporate integrity can consolidate the positive relationship between CSR propaganda and employer attractiveness. However, when corporate compensation level is low, the CSR propaganda will contribute to increasing the employer attractiveness. This paper expands the research and boundary conditions related to CSR propaganda and employer attractiveness, and can guide firms to appropriately use CSR propaganda to attract talents according to their own conditions (such as corporate compensation level and corporate integrity level).

Finally, this paper clarifies the impact of CSR propaganda on the employer attractiveness in the Chinese context. Extant researches in the field of CSR are mostly carried out in developed countries. And the lack of relevant researches in China is harmful to the sustainable development of Chinese firms. Therefore, it is urgent to study the relationship between CSR and human resource management in China. The results of our study can provide theoretical support for Chinese firms to implement CSR propaganda and gain advantages in the talent war.

6.2.2 Implications for practitioners

Some practical implications can be provided to firms' HRM. Firstly, not only the information of the employer, vacation job, and compensation should be recommended in the recruitment brochure, but also the CSR propaganda in the process of recruitment, so as to attract more talents. In addition, CSR is a multi-dimensional construct, including financial responsibility, legal responsibility, ethical responsibility and charitable responsibility. Firms should not only strengthen the implementation of all aspects of social responsibility, but also carry out more comprehensive and multi-level social responsibility propaganda.

Secondly, firms should pay attention to match the CSR propaganda and the integrity level when recruiting talents. Firms with a high level of integrity can carry out various forms of CSR propaganda, such as including relevant social responsibility information in recruitment advertisements or publishing CSR reports on their websites. As the public pay more and more attention to the CSR, more and more firms start to regularly release social responsibility reports. These forms of advertising help honest firms increase their appeal to job seekers. For firms lacking integrity, exaggerated CSR propaganda may be counterproductive and cause suspicion and aversion in job seekers. With the development of Internet, the public have more channels to obtain information. False propaganda is easy to spot. Therefore, it is suggested to carry out social responsibility propaganda truthfully to enhance employer attractiveness.

Thirdly, for companies with low compensation levels, social responsibility propaganda helps to make employers more attractive. It is recommended for companies with unattractive compensation levels, such as start-ups with insufficient funds to provide CSR information in their recruitment advertisements to attract more job seekers. However, for firms with a higher compensation level, the employer attractiveness is maintained at a higher level. There is no need to spend additional resources on CSR propaganda in the recruitment process.

6.2.3 Implications for industry

First of all, the whole industry should pay attention to CSR propaganda and CSR information disclosure for job seekers, the government and other stakeholders to supervise (Xiang et al., 2022). This is not only conducive to enhancing the competitive advantage of firms in the capital market and commodity market but also lays the foundation for enhancing their attractiveness in the human resources market. Secondly, the whole industry should be encouraged to establish an employer attractiveness evaluation system and publish the evaluation results to the public on time. This is not only conducive to promoting healthy competition in the human resources market, but also conducive to job seekers identifying and finding their favorite employers.

6.3 Limitations

(1) It should be noticed that the samples used in this research were college students. College students receive a higher level of education with higher social consciousness (Ma et al., 2020). Therefore, they may pay more attention to CSR propaganda in the process of job hunting. The sample used in this study may limit the generality of the conclusions. In fact, job seekers with different work experiences and different educational backgrounds

may view CSR propaganda differently. In future, experimental methods could be used to introduce more variables to explore the boundary conditions between CSR propaganda and employer attractiveness. (2) In this paper, corporate compensation and corporate integrity, two obvious corporate characteristics, are introduced into the theoretical model for exploration. In fact, personal characteristics have an important influence on job seekers' green job-hunting intention. In future, we can introduce more variables (such as personal moral inclination, individual prosocial degree, etc.) through experimental methods to further study the boundary conditions between CSR propaganda and employer attractiveness.

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Data Availability The datasets generated during and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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