



Effects of social responsibility on legitimacy and revisit intention: The moderating role of anxiety

Alicia Blanco-González^{a,*}, Gabriel Cachón-Rodríguez^a, Felipe Hernández-Perlines^b, Camilo Prado-Román^a

^a Rey Juan Carlos University (Spain), Paseo de los Artilleros s/n, 28032 Madrid, Spain

^b University of Castilla-La Mancha (Spain), San Pedro Mártir, s/n, 45002 Toledo, Spain

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ABSTRACT

Companies that develop social responsibility actions gain legitimacy, which increases consumer trust and revisit intention. However, the effects of both socially responsible actions and legitimacy on customer behavior are not always direct, as they vary depending on the context. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed a new context in which emotions play a determining role in consumer behavior. The number of people diagnosed with anxiety continues to grow worldwide, and this is known as a mental health epidemic. The aim of this research is to explore the moderating effect of anxiety on the relationships between social responsibility, legitimacy, and revisit intention. Using a sample of 1,200 supermarket buyers and applying a structural equation system, it is shown that social responsibility and legitimacy influence revisit intention, and the level of anxiety moderates these relationships. This study suggests building trust by adapting business policies to consumers' emotional backgrounds.

1. Introduction

COVID-19, economic instability, or armed conflicts have generated a context full of uncertainties that negatively affected economic and social lives of people and highly impacted mental health (Baker et al., 2020; Cruz-Cárdenas et al., 2021; Díez-Martín et al., 2022; Guttman & Lev, 2021). The use of antidepressants and the number of people diagnosed with anxiety and depression in the European Union and Spain continues to increase (Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, 2020). According to the Statista Global Consumer Survey (2021), 46 % of Swedes, 42 % of Americans, or 27 % of Spaniards reported experiencing mental health problems such as depression, stress, or anxiety in 2020. According to the UN (2021), millions of people worldwide have mental health disorders, and it is estimated that one in four will experience a mental health disorder throughout their lives. The "State of the Global Workplace 2021 Report" written by Gallup in 116 countries highlights that due to "global border closures, workplace closures, and job reductions, daily stress among workers has reached a record high".

It is a fact that COVID-19 revealed an illness that was already present among us, but which was not being discussed (Omar et al., 2021). It is

what has come to be known as the mental health epidemic (World Health Organization, 2021). According to Santomauro et al. (2021), worldwide depression and anxiety disorders are estimated to have increased by 28 % and 26 %, respectively, during the pandemic. This means that, in 2020, there were 53 million more depressive disorders and 76 million more anxiety diagnoses.

These complex and extreme situations have caused significant changes in consumer behavior (Kemp et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2020). Consumers reduced their purchases from physical shops and increased their online shopping; retailers took measures to minimize health risks and build consumer loyalty (Payne et al., 2021). The mental health epidemic (World Health Organization, 2021) obliged retailers to adapt their processes and consumer experience to positively approach mental illnesses, such as anxiety (Cruz-Cárdenas et al., 2021; Omar et al., 2021). In addition, traditional brick-and-mortar retailers had to reinvent themselves to compete with online platforms (Anastasiadou et al., 2020; Sheth, 2020).

Customers prefer committed companies (Miotto et al., 2020). In the quest to get closer to their consumers, organizations behave in a socially accepted way in accordance with social norms and values to achieve

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: alicia.blanco@urjc.es (A. Blanco-González), gabriel.cachon@urjc.es (G. Cachón-Rodríguez), Felipe.HPerlines@uclm.es (F. Hernández-Perlines), camilo.prado.roman@urjc.es (C. Prado-Román).

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social support from stakeholders and gain their loyalty (Miotto & Youn, 2020). According to the Institutional Theory, respectful companies gain legitimacy (Suchman, 1995) and therefore favor positive behavioral intentions (Ailawadi et al., 2013; Scherer et al., 2013; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). Companies have focused on CSR as an influential strategy to attract customers who opt for meaningful, responsible, and sustainable products and services (Al Jarah & Emeagwali, 2017). Companies can successfully use CSR to develop customers' revisit intentions by enhancing their relational value (Ahn & Kwon, 2020), because when companies perform in a socially desirable way, they acquire legitimacy (Suchman, 1995). Ozdora-Aksak and Atakan-Duman (2016) showed that some companies apply CSR to build legitimacy, enhance their image, and gain positive perceptions and public acceptance. Thus, a strong relationship between CSR strategies and legitimacy has been demonstrated (Del-Castillo-Feito et al., 2022; Díez-Martín et al., 2021), showing that responsible and sustainable companies are gaining greater legitimacy (Bai et al., 2019; Miotto & Youn, 2020).

However, the effects of CSR and legitimacy on consumer behavior are not always direct, as they depend on mediators and contexts (Ahn & Kwon, 2020; Díez-Martín et al., 2022) and emotions may affect consumer behavior (Díez-Martín et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2020). Researchers are analyzing the relationship between the effects of anxiety, risk aversion, and self-isolation (Laato et al., 2020), and customer engagement (Payne et al., 2021), in the context of uncertainty (Díez-Martín et al., 2022) in terms of behavioral intentions, since anxiety may affect customer satisfaction and revisiting intention (Batouei et al., 2020).

The aim of this study is to explore the interaction effect of anxiety on the relationships between CSR, legitimacy, and revisit intention. For this purpose, the following research questions are posed: 1) Do CSR policies impact legitimacy and generate higher revisit intention? 2) Does legitimacy generate a positive impact on revisit intention? 3) Can these relationships be modified by consumers' anxiety perception? 4) Will it be necessary to adapt purchase behavior models to anxious and non-anxious individuals? To respond to these questions, 1,200 supermarket users were surveyed and a partial least squares structural equation system (PLS-SEM) was applied. This has important implications for management and highlights the need to adapt purchase behavior models to new constraints. This research contributes to Institutional Theory on how legitimacy and CSR influence revisit intention. It also demonstrates the role of anxiety as a moderating variable in these relationships. This is of great relevance because it is a mental health aspect that affects an increasing number of people worldwide.

The paper is organized as follows. First, we define a theoretical framework for CSR, legitimacy, revisit intention, and the moderating role of anxiety. Second, we describe the sample and the quantitative methodology used. Finally, we discuss our findings, their implications, and limitations.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. CSR and legitimacy

“Organizational legitimacy is the perceived appropriateness of an organization to a social system in terms of rules, values, norms, and definitions” (Deephouse et al., 2017, p. 9). Legitimacy is one of the most vibrant topics in business management (Díez-Martín et al., 2021) because organizations need social support to survive and succeed in the long term (Deephouse et al., 2017). Handelman and Arnold (1999) emphasize that the assessment of legitimacy is based on the effects of organizations' behavior aimed at the welfare of society. Organizations that focus on social welfare are perceived as honest and appropriate (Delgado-Alemán et al., 2020). In the retail sector, some companies have focused on their commitment to CSR to target messages to external audiences seeking quicker recognition (Bitektine & Song, 2022; Kanji & Chopra, 2010). They have even used CSR in advertising campaigns as a quick

way to gain recognition (Lortie et al., 2022; Margolis & Walsh, 2003).

However, CSR continues, as companies understand the need to build long-lasting relationships with their stakeholders (Freudenreich et al., 2020). In this regard, it has been shown that consumers are willing to engage with organizations that meet their expectations and that fulfill social needs and demands (Dmytriiev et al., 2021). Consumers believe that companies should respond to social issues and not only focus on the economic impact of their activities (Del-Castillo-Feito et al., 2022; Brunk & de Boer, 2020).

Organizations that show real commitment to CSR will have greater internal and external support and will be perceived as legitimate (Bitektine & Song, 2022; Dyllick, 2015; Palazzo & Scherer, 2006). Several scholars have highlighted the positive outcomes of implementing CSR initiatives, such as improved economic performance (Escamilla-Solano et al., 2022; Surroca et al., 2010; Zhang et al., 2018), better financial results (Orlitzky, 2013; Wang et al., 2017) and better stakeholder perceptions, resulting in improved levels of reputation, image, or legitimacy (Campbell, 2007; Odriozola and Baraibar-Diez, 2017).

Furthermore, companies' socially responsible behavior has a direct impact on consumers' perceptions of the company (Czinkota et al., 2014; Rindova et al., 2005). CSR has been strongly linked to sustainability (Beske et al., 2014; Genovese et al., 2017), demonstrating that introducing these policies can help build a sustainable company in the eyes of society and customers (Dauvergne & Lister, 2012; Toussaint et al., 2021).

- *Hypothesis 1: The implementation of CSR policies will impact consumers' legitimacy perceptions.*

2.2. CSR and revisit intention

Different studies have revealed that, in addition to monetary rewards (deals, discounts, etc.), social and environmental actions developed by CSR contribute to a higher consumer revisit intention (Chernev & Blair, 2015; Lee et al., 2018). Revisit intention is associated with positive support for an organization (Yang et al., 2020). It involves an attitudinal element composed of affective and pre-behavioral elements, and reflects the real behavioral intention of consumers to interact with the organization (Cachón-Rodríguez et al., 2019). Behavioral elements are the result of affective elements (Wang et al., 2017). Consumers who generate a positive attitude towards the organization consider it as their first purchase choice, do not search actively in other organizations, do not respond to deals, and if they need something, they look for it in the organization itself (Blanco-González et al., 2020).

Ahn (2019) suggests that CSR actions influence customers' positive evaluation and identification with a brand, although they do not have a direct effect on revisit intention. Akbari et al. (2021) assessed how consumers' perceptions of CSR influence revisit intention indirectly through variables such as trust or commitment (Ahn & Kwon, 2020). Jung and Yoon (2008) concluded that CSR positively influences image, and image has a positive and significant influence on preference and revisit intention. However, authors such as Cachón-Rodríguez et al. (2021) have revealed that CSR positively and directly affects loyalty. Organizations that operate responsibly strengthen the quality of the relationship between customers and the organization, which in turn drives customer loyalty (Nyadzayo et al., 2016; Cycyota et al., 2016). Customers' attitudes and loyalty towards organizations in response to CSR are closely linked to revisit intention (Al Jarah & Emeagwali, 2017; Pérez & Del Bosque, 2015).

- *Hypothesis 2: The implementation of CSR policies will impact on revisit intention.*

2.3. Legitimacy and revisit intention

Most stakeholders are willing to engage only with legitimate

organizations and avoid maintaining relationships with those questioned by the social system (Díez-Martín et al., 2022; Miotto & Youn, 2020; Deephouse et al., 2017). One of the most relevant advantages for legitimized organizations is the support they receive from customers, who become loyal and committed to them (Guo et al., 2017; Han et al., 2011). Legitimacy is considered a critical element of organizational survival and success (Suchman, 1995). Legitimate organizations can pursue their activities without being questioned and avoid societal challenges (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Organizations perceived as legitimate are in a better position to compete for resources and have unrestricted access to markets, which enhances their survival (Miotto et al., 2020). Deephouse et al. (2017) and Díez-Martín et al. (2021) viewed legitimacy as an important factor because it has a defined effect on social and economic exchanges for organizations. In addition, legitimacy affects variables that must be managed by organizations to build and maintain long-lasting relationships with customers (Payne et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2011). Among these factors, loyalty and commitment can be highlighted as key elements for organizational success (Bennet & Barkensjo, 2005; Walsh et al., 2010), showing a positive effect on customers' future behavior (Yang et al., 2020; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999).

A loyal customer does not look for alternatives, and if they need something, they look for it in the organization (Stangl et al., 2017). This generates several advantages for the organization, such as the intention to maintain long-term relationships, improve its image or reputation, or benefit from positive word of mouth (Miotto et al., 2020). Obtaining legitimacy is not enough for the organization; it must share it with its customers and maintain consistent and constant communication with all of them in an environment where transparency and accountability are valued. The organization must constantly convert that legitimacy and social support into revisit intention (Scherer et al., 2013).

In the retail sector, consumers' decisions are based on economic, functional, and sociocultural evaluations (Yang et al., 2020). Handelman and Arnold (1999) find that if retailers want to be successful in the long run, they must engage in actions that help achieve legitimacy. Kim et al. (2014) identify a significant effect of a retailer's social norms-based actions on legitimacy, which in turn leads to loyalty. Given the competition in the retail sector, legitimacy plays a decisive role, as it favors consumer support over other options in a multi-channel environment.

Legitimacy influences consumer behavior and attitudes, as it creates favorable evaluations of companies and products (Brown & Dacin, 1997). When consumers perceive that a company complies with institutional norms, they are willing to grant it legitimacy and continue to support its activities within society (Valor et al., 2021). Therefore, companies seek to achieve legitimacy among stakeholders who have the power and ability to support the organization (Meyer and Scott, 1983). Legitimacy organizations encourage participation in actions that promote social welfare and the institutional environment (Guo et al., 2017).

- *Hypothesis 3: Legitimacy has a positive effect on revisit intention.*

2.4. The moderating role of anxiety

In a state of anxiety, consumers are more likely to act with risk aversion and evaluate external stimuli as imminent dangers (Lerner & Keltner, 2001). Anxiety is a generalized sense of imbalance arising from feelings of unease, tension, worry, or apprehension about what may happen (Stephan & Stephan, 1985). Anxiety is the combined result of stress and perception of a threat from a negative outcome, even if the threat is not real (Stephan et al., 1999). Anxiety can lead people to act uncomfortably or increase their efficacy by influencing proactive behaviors (Stephan et al., 1999). Panic attacks can occur when the level of anxiety is high (Omar et al., 2021). The mere fear of a panic attack causes the person to avoid behaviors or situations that can trigger it (Batouei et al., 2020; Aafjes-van Doorn et al., 2019), so anxiety can influence the fact of going shopping or not (Laato et al., 2020).

According to Expectancy Theory, anxiety is the result of aversive stimulation that prevents people from behaving in a relaxed and natural way and leads them to avoid situations that may generate anxiety (Hagopian & Ollendick, 1994; Omar et al., 2021). Thus, the expectation of danger, fear, or trigger motivates people to avoid certain behaviors (Reiss, 1991). Therefore, it is important to consider the role of response expectancy in preventing anxiety (Kirsch, 1997). According to the Reactance Theory, anxiety is explained in terms of people's responses after experiencing the threat of freedom (Bruchm & Brehm, 1981). In addition, Behavioral Inhibition Theory explains why people respond differently in a specific situation (Omar et al., 2021; Laato et al., 2020). Purchase behavior is explained by these theories because they highlight the importance of emotions such as anxiety in behavior (Tull et al., 2020). Cruz-Cárdenas et al. (2021), Omar et al. (2021), Sim et al. (2020), and Yuen et al. (2020) showed that anxiety influences purchase behavior.

Duan and Zhu (2020), Meyer (2020), Sheth (2020), Díez-Martín et al. (2022), Li et al. (2020), and Rather (2021) show how the uncertainty generated by COVID-19 influences consumer behavior. The pandemic has intensified certain determining factors affecting purchase behavior, which has not been the focus of much attention. Arumugam (2020) and Hyams et al. (2002) demonstrate that fear of an unknown infectious deadly virus can have a psychological effect on people, leading to increased anxiety and stress. Diebner et al. (2020) and Yang et al. (2020) state that consumers' experiences have changed, so the way in which companies offer their services, empathy, and care towards customers and the community is crucial. Meyer (2020) states that COVID-19 has changed what, how, and when people purchase. Sheth (2020) considers that consumption habits may be replaced by more efficient ways or changes in purchasing choices for certain products.

The literature suggests that positive and negative emotions play important roles in purchase intention (Hung & Lu, 2018; Khan, 2010). Herzenstein et al. (2015) state that anxiety affects purchase intention. Gallagher et al. (2017) find that anxiety can increase consumers' intentions to make bulk purchases. Lee et al. (2018) found that anxiety mediates the relationship between stereotypical threats and purchase intention. Bakioglu et al. (2020) establish that anxiety mediates the relationship between fear of COVID-19 infection, intolerance of uncertainty, and an individual's positive emotions. Otero-Lopez and Villardefrancos (2013) find that anxiety mediates the influence of materialism on addictive consumer buying. Therefore, this study establishes that consumers with different levels of anxiety behave differently when they visit shops (Fig. 1).

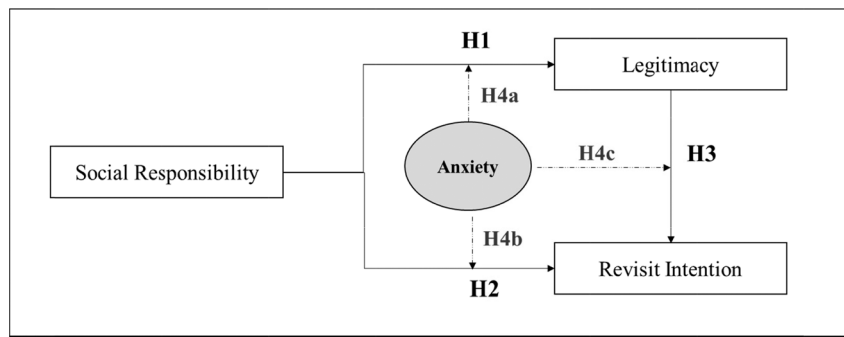
- *Hypothesis 4a: Anxiety moderates the effect of CSR on legitimacy.*
- *Hypothesis 4b: Anxiety moderates the effect of CSR on revisits.*
- *Hypothesis 4c: Anxiety moderates the effect of legitimacy on revisit intention.*

3. Sample and methodology

3.1. Sample

We focused on the retail sector, specifically, supermarkets. This choice is based on the fact that the products purchased in these shops are basic necessities, revisiting is frequent, there is interaction with people (other buyers, cashiers, etc.), and the online market has not eliminated the option of going to the supermarket (Panzone et al., 2021). This makes it a suitable setting to validate the relationship between the variables and, most importantly, the impact of anxiety.

The fieldwork was conducted in May 2021. The online questionnaire was aimed at 1,200 inhabitants of the five largest cities in Spain by population size (Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Seville, and Zaragoza). Anxiety-related problems are more intense in large cities (Diala et al., 2003; Romans et al., 2011). The dissemination of the questionnaire was carried out by a market research consultancy, which ensured random



Source: Own elaboration

Fig. 1. Theoretical Model Source: Own elaboration.

probability sampling (sampling error 2.83) and was representative of the Spanish population over 18 years of age. Table 1 shows the information regarding the sample profiles.

3.2. Variable measurement

All the variables considered were measured through adapted items from existing scales using a 7-point Likert scale and relevant sources (Table 2). To measure legitimacy, three items were taken from Blanco-González et al. (2020) or Del-Castillo-Feito et al. (2022). To measure CSR, the nine items provided by Freudenreich et al. (2020) and Dmytriiev et al. (2021) were considered. For revisit intention, three items by Yang et al. (2020) and Cachón-Rodríguez et al. (2021) were used, and for anxiety, two items by Omar et al. (2020) and Yang et al. (2020) were used.

3.3. Statistical analysis PLS-SEM

PLS-SEM and SmartPLS3 software were used for data processing. PLS-SEM is a multivariate analysis method that is comparable to other methods, such as CB-SEM or AMOS (covariance-based), and is mainly designed for exploratory studies. Its main purpose is to predict dependent variables by estimating path models (Hair et al., 2019; Henseler, 2017). PLS focuses primarily on causal-predictive analysis in high-complexity, low-information-theory settings (Hair et al., 2019). While PLS has indicators that maximize the explained variance and is oriented towards prediction, structural equation models based on covariances try to explain the fit based on the goodness of a model to interpret the

Table 1 Sample profile.

Characteristics	Total	(%)
Gender		
Male	580	49 %
Female	620	51 %
Age		
18–24	137	11 %
25–34	182	15 %
35–44	269	22 %
45–65	452	38 %
Over 66	160	14 %
Purchase frequency		
Rarely	6	0.5 %
Occasionally	103	8.5 %
Once a week	513	43 %
Twice a week	431	36 %
Daily	147	12 %
Anxiety		
High level	482	40 %
Low level	718	60 %
Total Sample	1200	-

Table 2 Items.

Construct	Item	Description	Source
Legitimacy	LEG1	Supermarket activity is useful for society	Valor et al. (2021), Castillo-Feito et al. (2022), Miotto et al. (2020), Blanco-González et al. (2020), Stangl et al. (2017); Díez-Martín et al. (2013)
	LEG2	Supermarket performances are socially acceptable	
	LEG3	You can trust this supermarket	
CSR	CSR1	This supermarket cares about the environment	Akbari et al. (2021), Dmytriiev et al. (2021), Freudenreich et al. (2020), Czinkota et al. (2014), Rindova et al. (2005)
	CSR2	This supermarket fulfils its social responsibilities	
	CSR3	This supermarket gives back to society part of what it has received	
	CSR4	This supermarket is concerned about improving the welfare of society	
	CSR5	This supermarket is a socially responsible company	
	CSR6	This supermarket makes philanthropic contributions	
	CSR7	This supermarket makes an effort to create new jobs	
	CSR8	This supermarket seems like a good company to work for	
	CSR9	This supermarket seems to treat its employees well	
Revisit Intention	REI1	I consider this supermarket as my first choice compared to other service providers	Díez-Martín et al. (2022), Cachón-Rodríguez et al. (2021), Yang et al. (2020), Ahn (2019)
	REI2	I have a strong intention to visit this supermarket again	
	REI3	I intend to continue buying in this supermarket in the near future	
Anxiety	ANX1	I feel anxious when I shop in the supermarket	Omar et al. (2021), Diebner et al. (2020), Arumugam (2020), Herzenstein et al. (2015)
	ANX2	My level of anxiety often prevents me from performing certain behaviors	
	ANX3	Anxiety often leads me to avoid certain behaviors	

observations of the different measurements made through the analysis of the variance and covariance (Hair et al., 2019). PLS aims to avoid collinearity problems and the non-assumption of hypotheses about the distribution of variables (Henseler & Schubert, 2020). In addition, it allows for the evaluation of moderating effects through categorical or multigroup analyses (Hair et al., 2019). Owing to the advantages offered by the PLS technique over techniques or models based on covariance

(MBC), it has spread widely among researchers in the area of business administration and marketing (Cachón-Rodríguez et al., 2021).

Multi-group analysis is carried out using two non-parametric methods, PLS-MGA and permutations, because they have the advantage of not imposing the data distribution (Henseler, 2017). Hair et al. (2018) suggest using the permutations method, since it enables the evaluation of hypotheses without imposing direction, and as a reliable and recommended method. Data processing by means of PLS-SEM implies analysing, in the first place, the reliability and validity of the measurement model (Chin, 1998). Second, we evaluate the structural model to test the hypotheses raised regarding the effect of anxiety. Finally, to carry out the multi-group analysis, we evaluated the measurement invariance (MICOM) and moderating effect caused by the level of anxiety.

4. Results

4.1. Results of direct effects

Assessment of the measurement model of the estimated constructs involves analyzing the individual reliability of its indicators observed through their loadings and the reliability of the latent variables through Cronbach’s alpha (CA), composite reliability (CR), and Dijkstra Statistic Henseler (rho_A). The assessment of the measurement model requires others to analyze convergent validity through the average variance extracted (AVE) and discriminant validity through the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) (Hair et al., 2019). For the values of the loadings of the individual indicators and of the CA, values above 0.7 (Hair et al., 2018) are recommended. CR values higher than 0.6 or 0.7 are suggested (Dibbern & Chin, 2010). The rho_A statistic values above 0.6 are considered optimal (Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015). AVE values greater than 0.5 are suggested (Chin, 2010). For the analysis of discriminant validity, HTMT ratio values lower than 0.90 are suggested (Kline, 2015). Table 3 shows that all indicators meet the required thresholds.

4.2. Assessment of the structural model

The second step is to evaluate the structural model. This involves conducting an analysis of the collinearity of the structural model through the inflation invariance factor (VIF) and the statistical significance of the effects of the path coefficients. Table 4 shows VIF values below 3.3 (Hair et al., 2019), thus ruling out problems related to this indicator.

Table 3
Convergent validity and reliability and discriminant analysis.

Convergent validity and reliability						
Construct	Items	Loadings	CA	CR	rho_A	AVE
Legitimacy	LEG1	0.866	0.850	0.909	0.851	0.769
	LEG2	0.894				
	LEG3	0.870				
CSR	CSR1	0.809	0.941	0.951	0.944	0.682
	CSR2	0.875				
	CSR3	0.846				
	CSR4	0.879				
	CSR5	0.873				
	CSR6	0.757				
	CSR7	0.784				
	CSR8	0.797				
	CSR9	0.804				
Revisit Intention	REI1	0.768	0.719	0.793	0.644	0.565
	REI2	0.735				
	REI3	0.837				
Discriminant Analysis						
Factor	F1	F2	F3			
F1. Revisit Intention	0.751					
F2. Legitimacy	0.687	0.850				
F3. CSR	0.646	0.771	0.826			

Table 4
VIF and Hypothesis testing (main effects).

Relationship	VIF	Standardized beta	T-value
H1: CSR → Legitimacy	1.000	0.771***	56.472
H2: CSR → Revisit Intention	2.466	0.287***	8.306
H3: Legitimacy → Revisit Intention	2.466	0.466***	13.347
Revisit Intention: R² = 0.506; Q² = 0.275; Legitimacy: R² = 0.595; Q² = 0.454			
*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001 (based on t (4999), one-tailed test)			

In relation to the significance of the main effects, Table 4 indicates that legitimacy positively and significantly influences revisit intentions (H3: β = 0.466; p < 0.001). The direct effect of CSR on revisit intention revealed a positive and significant influence (H2: β = 0.287; p < 0.001). CSR has a positive and significant direct effect on legitimacy (H1: β = 0.771; p < 0.001). R² obtains a values of 0.506 (revisit intention) and 0.595 (legitimacy), which represents a moderate effect (Chin, 1998). Finally, as a criterion of predictive relevance, Stone–Geisser (Q²) obtains values of 0.275 (revisit intention) and 0.454 (legitimacy), which indicates that the model has predictive power.

4.3. Multi-group Results: The moderating effect of anxiety

To perform the multi-group analysis (interaction effect), using the permutations and MGA methods, it is necessary to evaluate the invariance of the measuring instrument (MICOM) through three steps (Hair et al., 2019): 1) invariance of the configuration, 2) compositional invariance assessment, and 3) assessment of equal means and variances (Table 5).

Table 6 shows that there are significant differences between high and low levels of anxiety in the proposed relationships, both with the permutation technique and with the Henseler PLS-MGA method. The influence of legitimacy on revisit intention is greater in low levels of anxiety (H4c). However, the influence of CSR on revisit intention (H4b), and the influence of CSR on legitimacy (H4a) are greater with high levels of anxiety.

5. Discussion and conclusion

5.1. Discussion

The aim of this study is to analyze which dimensions affect revisit intention from a dual perspective. On the one hand, we demonstrate that CSR affects legitimacy, and that both variables influence customers’ intention to revisit supermarkets. On the other hand, we evaluate how health-focused aspects, such as the level of anxiety perceived by customers, alter the effects of CSR and legitimacy on revisit intention in this type of establishment. In line with previous research (Hu et al., 2020; Joutsenvirta & Vaara, 2015), CSR was found to positively and significantly influence retailers’ perceived legitimacy. Thus, consumers reported that responsible actions increase their perceived legitimacy (Ahn & Park, 2018). Furthermore, revisit intention improves when consumers perceive CSR and legitimacy positively (Cachón-Rodríguez et al., 2021).

According to the results, the influence of CSR on legitimacy and revisit intention is moderated by anxiety. Consumers feel that the influence of CSR on legitimacy is greater when their anxiety levels are high. According to a literature review (Santomauro et al., 2021), anxiety has a strong impact on consumers, in this case, on legitimacy. Anxiety also affects revisiting intention as consumers become emotionally and professionally involved with products or companies (Kim et al., 2018). As the level of anxiety increases, in the supermarkets analyzed, the influence of CSR on revisit intention is greater (Hung & Lu, 2018; Yu et al., 2021). However, the results show that the effect of legitimacy on revisit intention is enhanced when anxiety level is lower. Based on these results, we propose a new contribution to the theoretical framework, arguing that anxiety management (Omar et al., 2021) enhances the

Table 5
Micom procedure.

	Compositional Invariance		Partial Invariance	Equal Mean		Equal variance		Full Invariance Total
	C = 1	5 % C _u		Differences	Confidence Interval 95 %	Differences	Confidence Interval 95 %	
F1.	1	0.999	Yes	-0.112	[-0.121,0.119]	0.157	[-0.183,0.167]	Yes
F2.	1	1.000	Yes	-0.306	[-0.126,0.120]	0.237	[-0.186,0.173]	No
F3.	1	1.000	Yes	-0.138	[-0.118,0.122]	0.171	[-0.196,0.178]	No

Table 6
Results of multi-group analysis.

Relationship	Path coefficient High anxiety	Path coefficient Low anxiety	P-value Permutation	P-value PLS-MGA	Acceptance
H4a: CSR → Legitimacy	0.821	0.757	0.027*	0.016*	Yes/Yes
H4b: CSR → Revisit Intention	0.517	0.237	0.001**	0.001**	Yes/Yes
H4c: Legitimacy → Revisit Intention	0.327	0.491	0.038*	0.031*	Yes/Yes

n = 5.000 subsamples; *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

effect of CSR on legitimacy and revisit intention.

An organization’s CSR goes far beyond economic performance (Blanco-González et al., 2020). Organizations are responsible for improving people’s lives and solving important global problems (Del-Castillo-Feito et al., 2022). Thus, consumers in the retail sector are attracted to organizations concerned about and aligned with social issues (Payne et al., 2021). The results show that legitimacy has a positive effect on revisit intention. When consumers consider their organizations legitimate, they are more attracted to returning to the establishment, thanks to the positive impact on society. In turn, legitimacy reinforces the benefits of CSR (Dyllick, 2015), indicating that retailers’ ability to generate legitimacy is key to providing the service in order to generate a higher number of visits. Therefore, positive social impacts legitimize organizations, triggering subsequent behavioral intentions that contribute to increased organizational performance (Cycyota et al., 2016).

The results also reveal that anxiety is a strong moderator of CSR’s effect on legitimacy and revisit intention. The higher the level of anxiety, the greater the effect of CSR on both the variables. Previous studies indicate that preparation and responsiveness to anxiety should be prioritized to achieve a higher revisit intention during COVID-19 (Li et al., 2020; Rather, 2021). When anxiety is high, society’s perceptions are likely to be distorted, leading to increased responsibility-seeking (Sik, 2020). Curiously, the results reveal that the lower the levels of perceived anxiety, the greater the effect of legitimacy on revisit intention. In this regard, the literature supports the benefits of possessing legitimacy, as it helps organizations buffer the effects of the anxiety generated by uncertainty (Díez-Martín et al., 2022), obtain resources, ensure growth and survival, and improve business performance (Deephouse et al., 2017).

5.2. Conclusions and future research lines

This research contributes to institutional theory on how legitimacy and CSR influence the intention to revisit. It also demonstrates the role of anxiety as a moderating variable in these relationships. This is of great relevance, because it is a mental health aspect that affects an increasing number of people (Omar et al., 2021; Tull et al., 2020). The research findings contribute by demonstrating a model to explain revisit intentions, in which anxiety plays a key role.

This research provides interesting implications for managers in general, and retail outlets and supermarkets in particular. We show that consumers’ revisit intentions improve when they perceive the positive benefits of an organization in society. Retailers should devote their efforts not only to providing the service or the purchasing experience

(Schamp et al., 2019), but also to the creation and transfer of positive actions for themselves and for society in general.

In addition to analyzing the perception of a positive external impact derived from CSR actions and legitimacy, it is necessary to focus on internal factors related to mental health, as they are necessary to explain revisit intention (Yang et al., 2020). Managers must establish an environment based on trust and credibility where consumers can perceive that organizations genuinely care about them. They must create environments that reduce uncertainty and fear, which can worsen mental health (Diala et al., 2003; Santomauro et al., 2021). Thus, they should increase their credibility and reduce anxiety accelerators (Omar et al., 2021). This anxiety will result in CSR having a positive impact on the legitimacy of organizations.

In this regard, managers should improve communication and understanding, provide more information, provide constant and effective information through experts, and conduct training programs for employees on how to deal with anxiety situations, for example, when long queues form at checkouts. Communication is a key tool for managing organizational legitimacy and performance (Prado-Roman et al., 2020). Managers must perceive that the external impact of the organization is just as important as the internal impact derived from mental processes; therefore, they must act to improve internal and external sources of consumer engagement.

The main limitation of this study is that we analyzed a group of retail outlets (supermarkets) and did not consider staff, which is a key element in the provision of the service. Furthermore, we considered only one country (Spain). Future research could include employees, corporate partners, or society in general, and replicate the study in other types of shops and countries. Moreover, context is key in Institutional Theory, and it influences organizational evaluations (Bitektine & Haack, 2015), according to market complexities, confidence, risk, or uncertainty (Díez-Martín et al., 2022). Future research may explore the relationship between CSR and legitimacy, and the moderating role of anxiety in different contexts. Finally, we found it particularly interesting to segment the sample by gender and age to validate reports that indicate that women and young people are currently experiencing more anxiety problems (Santomauro et al., 2021).

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CRedit authorship contribution statement

Alicia Blanco-González: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Supervision, Resources, Methodology,

Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Gabriel Cachón-Rodríguez**: Writing – original draft, Validation, Software, Methodology, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Felipe Hernández-Perlines**: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Methodology, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Camilo Prado-Román**: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Supervision, Investigation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Alicia Blanco-González <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8509-7993> <https://publons.com/researcher/2293215/alicia-blanco-gonzalez/> Alicia Blanco-González received her PhD in 2009 from Rey Juan Carlos University (Madrid, Spain). She is Professor of Marketing, at Department of Business Administration, Rey Juan Carlos University. Alicia is a Vice-dean of Academic Organization and International Relations, Faculty of Legal and Social Sciences, Rey Juan Carlos University – Madrid (Spain), Vice-President of European Academy of Management and Business Economics, General Secretary at Camilo Prado Foundation, and Member of Spanish Association of Academic and Professional Marketing. She is interested in the study of legitimacy, reputation and corporate social responsibility and consumer behavior research.

Gabriel Cachón-Rodríguez <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4228-2881> <https://publons.com/researcher/3220204/gabriel-cachon/> Lecturer at the University Rey Juan Carlos of the Department of Business Economics in the Marketing and Market Research area. PhD from the University Rey Juan Carlos. MBA from EUDE-Business School. Master's Degree in Senior Management from the University Rey Juan Carlos. Member of the European Academy of Management and Business Economics (AEDEM). His lines of research focus on the intangible assets of marketing.

Felipe Hernández-Perlines <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6409-5593> <https://publons.com/researcher/1285185/felipe-herandez-perlines/> Felipe Hernández-Perlines is PhD in Economics and Business. He is a professor of Strategic Management in the Department of Business Administration at the University of Castilla-La Mancha (Spain). He has been a visiting professor at universities in Italy, France, Mexico and the United States. His research has focused on agri-food cooperatives, family businesses and the tourism sector. His work has been published in journals such as *Journal Business Research*, *R&D Management*, *European Journal of International Management*, *Psychology & Marketing*, *Frontiers in Psychology*, *Management Decision*, *European Journal of International Management*, *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* and *International Journal of Hospitality Management*. In addition, he is guest editor of a special issue of the *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research* entitled *New Family Business Models: Between the Business and the Family*.

Camilo Prado-Román <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1540-0643> <https://publons.com/researcher/794155/camilo-prado-roman/> Camilo Prado-Román received his PhD in 2009 from Rey Juan Carlos University. He is Full Professor in the Business Economics Department at Rey Juan Carlos University (Madrid) and General Secretary of the European Academy of Management and Business Administration (AEDEM). His research interests include organizational legitimacy and institutional theory.