

# **The Impact of Corporate Social Responsibility, Moral Emotions, and Customers' Altruism on Brand Advocacy Behaviors: Evidence from Vietnam**

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### **Abstract**

Corporate Social Responsibility has emerged as one of the most important practices driving corporate success, owing to its impact on customers' moral emotions, which subsequently affects customers' behavior, such as brand advocacy. From the Vietnamese dairy industry context, this study investigates the role of moral emotions, such as admiration, gratitude, elevation, and trust, in the relationship between CSR and consumers' brand advocacy. The study also analyzes altruism's moderating effect on the link between CSR and moral emotions. To achieve these two objectives, the study surveyed 298 respondents and employed structural equation modeling for analysis. The findings demonstrate the positive influences of CSR on moral emotions, which in turn positively affect brand advocacy. Additionally, the study demonstrates the mediating effects of admiration, gratitude, and elevation on the relationship between CSR and brand advocacy behaviors, as well as the altruism's positive moderating effect on the relationship between CSR and elevation. Finally, various implications have been presented based on the study's results.

**Keywords:** admiration, brand advocacy, altruism, corporate social responsibility, elevation, gratitude, moral emotion, trust.

## 1. Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a broad range of company practices that prioritize social benefits over their own (Han et al., 2020). The concept of CSR includes several facets, such as economic, ethical, legal, and philanthropic, which illustrate its complicated nature (Lee et al., 2020), and in recent years, it has become one of the standard business practices. In addition, the establishment of a successful CSR strategy plays a significant role in creating a competitive advantage for businesses (Cegliński & Wiśniewska, 2017), building their reputations (Fombrun, 2005), and improving their financial performances (Saeidi et al., 2015). According to Vitell (2015), one of the most important aspects of a successful business is that organizations focus on CSR. Such practices are essential to dialogue between companies and consumers (Nielsen, 2012), and many companies are becoming increasingly aware of this (Hemingway & MacLagan, 2004). Businesses can deploy CSR campaigns to enhance their brand image and reputation as well as consumer-corporate identification, which subsequently influences consumer behavior, leading to positive relational outcomes, such as loyalty, positive word of mouth, and attachment (Lichtenstein et al., 2004). As Agarwal and Malhotra (2019) have noted, the influence of firms' CSR practices on moral identity, emotions, judgment, and, subsequently, customer-brand relationship is an important case to research.

Research shows that CSR practices affect consumer emotions (Pérez & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2015), subsequently influencing their behavior (Wang & Wu, 2016). According to Jiang et al. (2014), emotions are more important in purchasing decisions than price or consumer preference. Such importance pushes researchers to explore the positive impact of CSR on consumers' moral emotions, such as admiration (Cegarra-Navarro & Martínez-Martínez, 2009), gratitude

(Kim & Park, 2020), elevation (Romani et al., 2016), and trust (Martínez & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013). However, Ahmed et al. (2020) acknowledge a gap in our understanding of customers' perceived CSR mechanism and its impact on consumer behavior. As a result, it is important to investigate the mechanism governing this relationship (Fatma & Khan, 2023). Several studies have also demonstrated the mediation effects of admiration (Ahmad et al., 2023), gratitude (Romani & Grappi, 2014), trust (Fatma & Khan, 2023), and elevation (Romani et al., 2013) on the relationship between CSR initiatives and customers' advocacy behaviors in separation. However, because of the intricacy of the CSR concept and the distinct impact of the moral emotions component, Fatma and Khan (2023) proposed that future studies include different aspects of moral emotions and CSR concurrently in the research framework to acquire a deeper knowledge of their complicated relationships. Also, it is acknowledged that CSR activities represent a company's consideration for environmental and natural resources issues and have been demonstrated to affect brand equity, brand credibility, brand reputation, brand advocacy, and also the company profitability on numerous occasions (Fatma & Khan, 2023; Khojastehpour & Johns, 2014; Phung & Nguyen, 2023; Wang et al., 2021). Among the brand's aspects, brand advocacy is desirable and important to companies due to its representation of customers' support through their behaviors of recommendations (Webster, 1975), promotions (Webster, 1977), or even protecting a brand from negative influences (Sashi et al., 2018). Unsurprisingly, CSR activities have become a major priority in business in general and the dairy industry in particular (Moisecu & Berács, 2015). Therefore, the first aim of this paper is to investigate the mediating effect of multiple components of moral emotions, at the same time, in the relationship between CSR and customer behavior captured by brand advocacy.

Additionally, marketing's objectives are frequently about discovering and satisfying customers' values (Luck et al., 2020), which have been shown to influence their actions (Marbach et al., 2019). In some specific instances, such as CSR practices organizations, customer values can also moderate their attitude and behaviors (Xie et al., 2015; Zou et al., 2021). In the case of CSR, customers' altruistic value (so-called altruism) is an important factor, as it demonstrates their consideration for others' merriment (Hartmann et al., 2017; Schwartz, 1977). Altruism has also been demonstrated to be frequently associated with moral emotions (Landis et al., 2009). Unsurprisingly, Romani et al. (2013) have mentioned that customers with high altruism will be more influenced by the organization's CSR activities, resulting in stronger moral emotions (Romani et al., 2013). Such a suggestion indicates a positive moderation effect of altruism in the relationship between CSR and the customers' moral emotions. However, previous research has only demonstrated the moderation effect of altruism on the relationship between CSR and gratitude (Romani et al., 2013), or admiration (Liu et al., 2023). Romani and Grappi (2014) also proposed that the same effect of moderation could be applied to other moral emotions. In light of the paucity of research on the effects of altruism in the context of CSR, there is an opportunity to expand the research paradigm in a distinct context (Liu et al., 2023). Therefore, this paper's second aim is to investigate the moderating effect of altruism in the relationship between CSR and moral emotions.

To achieve the mentioned objectives, this paper employs data from Vietnam's dairy industry, an intriguing case for research. Since the early 2000s, CSR has been introduced to the country through the investment activities of multinational companies (Hamm, 2012), such as Vinamilk, Unilever, and Coca-Cola. Since 1990, the country has undergone economic reform (Nguyen, 2015), accelerating its annual average GDP per capita growth rate to 5.5% until 2017

(Van & Dao, 2021). The Vietnamese dairy industry is an important sector contributing significantly to the country's sustainable development (Chen et al., 2021). Among the industry competitors, the Vietnam Milk Company (Vinamilk) and TH True Milk have produced annual sustainable development reports representing their sustainable practices, including CSR activities (Le et al., 2023; Vinamilk, 2023). Indeed, Vinamilk is the most preferred FMCG brand in 2020 (Carrasco, 2021), which is linked to its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Environment, Social, and Governance (ESG) initiatives (Nhân Dân, 2022). It is essential to consider that the mentioned organization frequently aligns its brand with cause-related projects (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2019). Previous research has also looked at the impact of genuine CSR initiatives on customer brand advocacy in the dairy industry (Phung & Nguyen, 2023). There is also a shortage of empirical studies on the influences of CSR and moral sentiments on the Vietnamese dairy business. Given the current success of adopting CSR activities in the Vietnamese dairy industry, it is important to conduct research to provide an in-depth investigation of the effects of CSR on customers' emotions and behaviors from their perspective, thereby benefiting both the dairy companies and their customers.

The study results illustrate the positive impacts of customers' perceived CSR on their admiration, gratitude, trust, and elevation, which in turn positively influence their brand advocacy behaviors. Additionally, mediation effects of admiration, gratitude, and elevation have been confirmed, along with the positive moderation effect of customers' altruism on the relationship between CSR and elevation. In general, it is safe to conclude that CSR has a significant positive impact on customers' advocacy behaviors through the mediation of their moral emotions and amplified by altruism.

## **2. Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses**

### **2.1 Corporate Social Responsibility**

Friedman (1970) maintains that corporations have only one, and just one, social responsibility—to utilize their resources and partake in activities for profits. This statement highlights a company's aim to satisfy the needs of its stakeholders. In addition, more and more corporations believe that they cannot effectively operate if they only focus on maximizing returns but take responsibility for their stakeholders, to a greater extent, to be responsible to society (Książak, 2017).

Davis (2017) proposes that CSR is the concern and reaction of companies to issues beyond meeting legal, economic, and technological requirements. According to Matten and Moon (2004), CSR is a concept that compounds various distinct aspects such as business ethics, corporate philanthropy, corporate citizenship, sustainability, and environmental responsibility. Consequently, the nature of Corporate Social Responsibility is the company's commitment to sustainable economic growth through activities to improve the living standard of the labor force and their families for the community and society in a way that benefits both the company and the social development (Saeidi et al., 2015).

### **2.2 Moral emotions**

Moral emotions are emotional responses to moral activities that motivate moral behavior (Haidt, 2003). Harris (2003) discusses the concept's complexity and multidimensionality, as well as the diverse influences of its components on human behavior. As a result, prior research has linked the concept to CSR activities (Vitell et al., 2016). Agarwal and Malhotra (2019) discussed the shift in CSR research direction from a cognitive process to moral emotions. Previous research has also examined the nature and influences of different types of moral

emotions: the negative aspects, including contempt, anger, disgust (Rozin et al., 1999), and shame and embarrassment (Harris, 2003); or the positive types, such as gratitude (Xie et al., 2015), admiration (Algoe & Haidt, 2009), trust (Choi & La, 2013), and elevation (Romani & Grappi, 2014). Moral emotions play a crucial role in cause-related marketing (Kim & Johnson, 2013). They are generated when consumers perceive the CSR activities of a company and then influence their supportive actions, such as brand advocacy (Xie et al., 2015). Following in the same vein, this study incorporates several types of moral emotions into the research framework, which are admiration, trust, gratitude, and elevation, to analyze further their roles in the customer-brand paradigm (Agarwal & Malhotra, 2019).

**Admiration** is the feeling of surprise and consensus of an individual; it evokes satisfaction, respect, and honor toward the actions or characteristics of another person or organization (Darwin et al., 1998). A company admirer can engage more apart from socially responsible purchasing, as admiration encourages people to act similarly to admired objects and promotes self-improvement (Algoe & Haidt, 2009). When a person or group joins a laudable action, admiration arises (Sweetman et al., 2013); hence, people need to help or cooperate with that person/group (Cuddy et al., 2007). Admiration is a positive, emotional, and moral value (Algoe & Haidt, 2009) evoked by ethical and virtuous behaviors (Immordino-Yang & Sylvan, 2010).

Customers may have this sentiment toward a company that adopts CSR due to the ethical manifestations of the CSR structure. Unsurprisingly, Cegarra-Navarro and Martínez-Martínez (2009) discovered that CSR is a precondition for admiring a company through an examination of 100 large Spanish firms of diverse industries using repeated ANOVA analyses. These benefits include the rise in customers' perception of the company's product/service quality,



innovation, global business, corporate culture, and ethics. As a result, the study has proposed H1 as follows:

***H1: CSR positively impacts customers' admiration.***

**Gratitude** usually stems from the perception of received benefits thanks to specific voluntary, intentional, or costly actions of other factors (McCullough et al., 2008). Customer gratitude demonstrates the emotional part of reciprocity and is essential to develop and maintain successful exchanges between buyers and sellers (Huang, 2015). Enmons and McCullough (2003) affirm that gratitude is a positive emotion resulting from positive outcomes provided by a person, company, or organization.

Gustafsson et al. (2005) concur that building and sustaining a credible buyer-seller relationship helps reduce customer turnover and ensure a long-term partnership. Goldenberg et al. (2014) suggest that the deeper people are attached to an organization, the more grateful they feel for its CSR. Furthermore, Kim and Park (2020) conducted a series of studies with a total sample size of 463, in which 102 customers were exposed to two different scenarios of high and low CSR of the top 15 tech companies (the companies of choice are the two that ranked first and fifteenth) with product failure manipulation; a series of ANOVA and MANOVA were performed to compare customers' perceptions regarding their gratitude in accordance with the company CSR's levels in the product failure context. That study's findings demonstrate the positive influence of CSR activities on customers' gratitude. Therefore, the study proposes H2 as follows:

***H2: CSR positively impacts customers' gratitude.***

**Trust** is defined by Anderson and Weitz (1992) as one party's belief that their needs will be satisfied by the actions of the other. Customer trust refers to the willingness to count on the ability of a brand to perform its declared purposes

(Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Another explains that experience with a company leads to trust and allows customers to evaluate the company's aptitude, altruism, and integrity (Choi & La, 2013). Furthermore, trust serves as a foundation for long-term relationships that originate from an examination of personal interactions (Spekman, 1988).

The positive and meaningful association between trust and CSR has been established in several studies, including Ball et al.'s (2004) research on 382 hospitality companies' customers or Swaen and Chumpitaz's (2008) study on 618 cosmetics and sportswear corporations' consumers. Employing the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) method, the two mentioned studies demonstrate the positive impact of a company's CSR on customers' trust. In general, customers will commit to and trust a company when it is socially responsible (Berry, 1995). Therefore, the study has proposed H3 as follows:

***H3: CSR positively impacts customers' trust.***

***Elevation*** is a moral emotional reaction experienced after observing acts of charity, kindness, sacrifice, or demonstration of virtue by others (Vianello et al., 2010). The factor includes the feeling of excitement, happiness, and deep inspiration (Haidt, 2003). Romani and Grappi (2014) realized that the company's CSR will lead to the feeling of elevation in customers. Using evidence from a mixed-method approach, they presented this emotion's crucial role in explaining consumer behavioral responses to CSR in local communities.

Elevation induced by benevolence activities such as CSR initiatives motivates consumers to respond ethically or prosocially (Aquino et al., 2011; Cox, 2010; Schnall et al., 2010). The elevation is an important factor in CSR practices, as it not only elicits altruism but also affects customers' attitudes toward such action (Lawler & Thye, 2006) and their behavior in supporting the CSR

corporate products (Romani et al., 2016). Additionally, the findings of Romani and Grappi's (2014) study of 140 Italian participants, using controlled scenarios of fictional companies' CSR initiatives and profiles, illustrated the positive impact of customers' perception of the corporate's CSR genuine motives on their feelings of elevation. Therefore, the study has proposed:

***H4: CSR positively impacts customers' elevation.***

### **2.3 Brand Advocacy**

Brand advocacy is a phenomenon where customers attempt to support their favorite brands in front of others through recommendations (Wilder, 2015). Brand advocacy arises when customers commence repurchasing certain goods due to high satisfaction (Kotler et al., 2017). Brand advocacy also includes behaviors of protecting a brand from criticism or negative feedback (Sashi et al., 2018). These types of consumer behaviors are crucial to a brand since they demonstrate the brand's power and image in customers' eyes (Fatma & Khan, 2023). Additionally, brand advocacy indicates a customer's perceptions, thoughts, concerns, and consumption of products delivered only to support and differentiate from other brands (Scott & Lane, 2000).

Advocacy also includes other valuable non-transactional merits, such as positive word-of-mouth (Du et al., 2007) or resistance against negative information about an organization (Sen et al., 2016). Employing the ANOVA analyses on a total of 252 participants of two experiments at Stanford University on non-profit or for-profit firms, Aaker et al. (2010) affirmed that consumers' judgment on corporate warmth-related traits is more willing to buy from the organization. Additionally, Aaker et al. (2012) surveyed 408 individuals to analyze their perceptions and feelings toward eight well-known brands in three categories: food, beverage, and medication. The study revealed that assessing

specific cognitive characteristics, such as an organization's traits or capacity, elicits favorable emotions, such as admiration, which subsequently positively impacts customers' intentions and support behaviors. Based on the above arguments, the study has proposed H5 as follows:

***H5: Customers' admiration positively impacts brand advocacy.***

According to the "Broaden and Build Theory of Positive Emotions" (Fredrickson, 2004), it is believed that positive emotions can expand an individual's activity patterns that reflect the emotions they experience. Therefore, heartfelt gratitude motivates consumers to behave ethically or prosocially based on the moral-enhancing function of gratitude analyzed above. Therefore, grateful customers should creatively consider a series of actions that can benefit others. Consequently, the study expects customers to engage in various advocative behaviors (e.g., spreading positive information, writing supportive articles, and trying new product offerings). Therefore, the study has proposed H6 as follows:

***H6: Customers' gratitude positively impacts brand advocacy.***

Trust is among the factors that distinguish relationships from mere transactions (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2001; Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002). Any personal relationship between individuals or a person and a brand is built on trust. Using the SEM method, research conducted on 140 Thai bank customers illustrated that trust functions as a bridge between customer attachment and interpersonal connection, turning a positive transactional orientation toward the brand into a long-term and intimate personal relationship, even a deep commitment (Eakuru & Mat, 2008). Therefore, the study expects that customer trust in CSR can lead to brand advocacy. The study has proposed H7 as follows:

***H7: Customers' trust positively impacts brand advocacy.***

Potential buyers can see the consideration of organizations and funds for ethical, natural, and social issues to avoid or diminish harm to individuals; elevation can result from these exemplary and excellent activities. Psychology research has proven that the tendency to behave out of elevation is the desire to associate more deeply with the person who does good deeds and to have similar actions for the interest of society (Haidt, 2003). From this approach, employing recall, video induction, event diary, and methods, Algoe & Haidt's (2009) studies on 295 University of Virginia students empirically established that elevation promotes prosocial and affiliate behaviors in general. Therefore, it is rational for customers to advocate a brand that implements prosocial activities (Li et al., 2022). The study, hence, expects that customer elevation will lead to brand advocacy.

***H8: Customers' elevation positively impacts brand advocacy.***

It is acknowledged that people like, are drawn to, and prefer relationships with others who are similar to them to boost their self-esteem and preserve consistency in their self-identification (Byrne et al., 1971; Tesser et al., 1988). Furthermore, the urge to conduct morally is the desire to be intimately associated with others who perform nice deeds and behave similarly for the sake of society (Algoe & Haidt, 2009). As a result, Haidt (2003) describes the strength of moral emotions, which emerge from being inspired by others and then transform people, compelling them to participate in comparable actions. Unsurprisingly, previous studies have examined the mediating role of gratitude (Romani et al., 2013), elevation (Romani & Grappi, 2014), and, more recently, admiration (Ahmad et al., 2023) in the relationship between CSR and customers' brand advocacy. However, it is acknowledged that the moral emotions aspect is complicated in nature, with varying effects on people's behaviors (Harris, 2003). Additionally, researchers will benefit from analyzing various moral emotions and

CSR dimensions concurrently within a single research framework (Fatma & Khan, 2023). As a result, the study has proposed H9 as follows:

***H9: Customers' (a) admiration, (b) gratitude, (c) trust, and (d) elevation mediate the relationship between CSR and brand advocacy.***

## **2.4 Altruism**

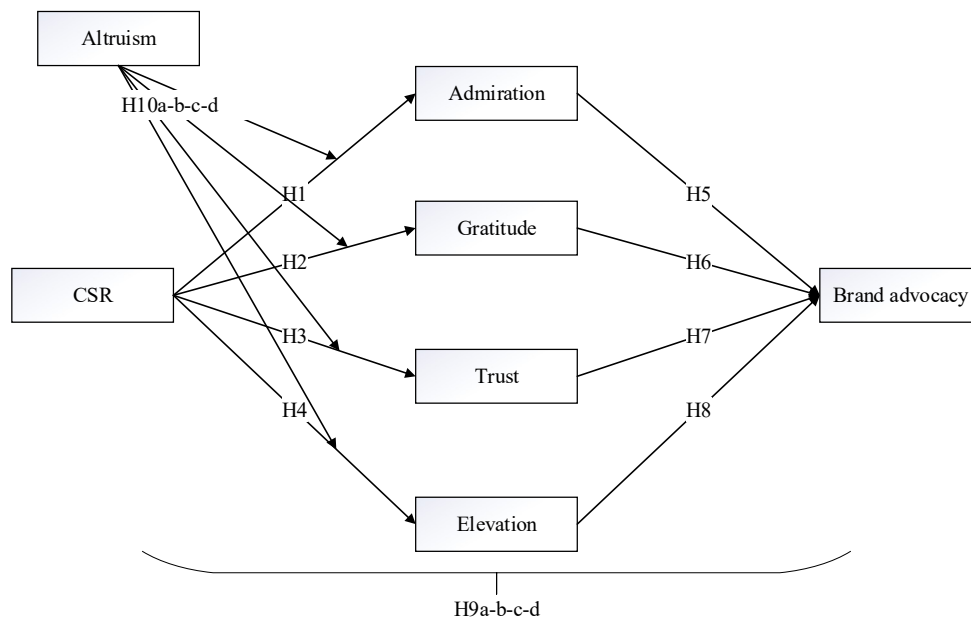
In general, altruism is a tendency to demonstrate concern for the happiness of others (Schwartz, 1977). The concept is also called altruistic values or altruistic personality characteristics (Hartmann et al., 2017). Gifford and Nilsson (2014) point out that altruistic values, directly and indirectly, affect customers' perspectives of society and their environmental protection when aware of the problem (Steg et al., 2014). Altruism is the principles and actions related to other people's welfare. Most of those who emphasize the motivating aspect of altruism agree that altruism refers to advertently helping others without expecting anything in return (Berkowitz, 1972) and empathizing with their needs (Macaulay et al., 1970; Cohen, 1972).

Recognizing these values acts as a guiding principle for selecting or evaluating behaviors, people, or events; past research predicts that altruistic persons will generally give favorable reviews and advocate for companies' social initiatives (Schwartz, 1992). Various psychological studies prove that witnessing altruistic acts induces elevation, motivating social orientation and altruism (Aquino et al., 2011; Schnall et al., 2010). In particular, Landis et al. (2009) also proved a positive correlation between the self-reported frequency of experiencing moral elevation and self-reported altruistic behavior. In attempts to explain the mechanism underlying the CSR effects in provoking customers' emotions and the induction of brand advocacy, previous research analyzed the moderating effect of altruism on the relationship between CSR and gratitude in the food

industry (Romani et al., 2013) and admiration in the banking industry (Liu et al., 2023). Also, it is suggested that the same effect might be applied to other types of moral emotions (Romani & Grappi, 2014). Due to the complexity of moral emotions and CSR's concepts and effects, it is necessary to conduct research that evaluates the moderating effect of altruism in different contexts and within a research framework that incorporates the participation of multiple moral emotions and the multi-dimensional assessment of CSR (Fatma & Khan, 2023; Romani & Grappi, 2014). Therefore, the study proposes:

***H10: Altruism is a moderating factor for the impact of CSR on customers' (a) admiration, (b) gratitude, (c) trust, and (d) elevation.***

Figure 1. Research framework



### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Sample

This research focused on the dairy industry, with information obtained from four dairy companies in Vietnam. When selecting the companies, the

criteria were: (i) The enterprise had to develop CSR practices effectively, and (ii) Consumers should have recognized the practices, either because of the company's dissemination operations or because of the company's or the project's proximity to the consumer. The final selection, resulting from a series of expert interviews regarding the top dairy companies in Vietnam, included Vinamilk, TH Truemilk (a product of TH Food), Dutch Lady (a product of Friesland Campina), and Nestlé. The list is consistent with the report of the Vietnamese dairy industry's leading market share companies, in which Vinamilk ranks first (43.7% market share), TH Food ranks second (14.1%), then Friesland Campina (9.4%), followed by Nestlé (7.5%) (Statista Research Department, 2023). An online survey was conducted among adult consumers of the four mentioned milk companies.

The study focuses on customers who have experienced a selected company's product and any of its CSR initiatives. The respondents were approached randomly in various shopping areas. Such practice has also been employed by previous CSR studies (Romani et al., 2013, 2016; Romani & Grappi, 2014). The researchers first introduce themselves and then present the respondents with the QR code that leads to a Google Form for survey participation. Before answering the assessment questions, respondents are asked (i) if they have ever tried a product from one of the four selected dairy companies and (ii) if they have ever experienced or recognized a CSR campaign from any of the four chosen companies. If a participant has not been exposed to both the product and CSR campaigns of the same company in the selected list, they will be transferred to the final acknowledgment section, and the survey will end. On the contrary, participants will be provided with information regarding the CSR activities of the company whose product and campaign they have encountered. After that, they will be asked to finish the survey based on their own reasoning.



After eliminating invalid correspondent forms, the total sample size was 298. Of the respondents, 41% advocated the CSR practices of Vinamilk, 25.5% advocated TH True Milk, 28.5% advocated Nestlé, and only 5% were Dutch Lady advocates. 35.2% of respondents were men and 64.8% were women. In terms of age, 93.3% of respondents were between 18 and 24 years old, 5.7% were between 24 and 40 years old, and 1% were 40 years old or older. Regarding education, 14.4% were in high school, 81.5% were undergraduate, and 4.1% were in higher education. Regarding marital status, 97% were single, and only 3% were married. Regarding income, 65.4% were financially dependent, 25.5% earned below 400 USD per month, 7% earned 400–600 USD per month, and only 2.1% earned more than 600 USD. The respondents' information is detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Respondents' characteristics

Characteristics	Frequencies	Percent	Characteristics	Frequencies	Percent
<b>Gender</b>			<b>Monthly income</b>		
Male	105	35.2%	No income	195	65.4%
Female	193	64.8%	Below 400 USD	76	25.5%
			400 USD – 600 USD	21	7%
			Above 600 USD	6	2.1%
<b>Age</b>			<b>Monthly income</b>		
18-24	278	93.3%	No income	195	65.4%
25-30	12	4.0%	Below 400 USD	76	25.5%
31-35	3	1.0%	400 USD – 600 USD	21	7%
36-40	2	0.7%	Above 600 USD	6	2.1%
Above 40	3	1.0%			
<b>Education</b>			<b>Marital status</b>		
Below university	43	14.4%	Not married	289	97.0%
Undergraduate	243	81.5%	Married	9	3.0%
Higher education	12	4.1%			
<b>The advocated dairy brands</b>					
Vinamilk	122	41.0%			
TH True Milk	76	25.5%			
Nestlé	85	28.5%			
Dutch Lady	15	5.0%			

### 3.2 Measures

The study used a 5-point Likert scale with “1=strongly disagree” and “5=strongly agree” for every item. CSR was measured using Alvarado-Herrera

et al.'s (2017) 18-item scale with three dimensions of six items each: the social dimension, the economic dimension, and the environmental dimension. Admiration was measured using Castro-González et al.'s (2019) 3-item scale; gratitude was measured with three items based on scales proposed by Romani et al. (2013) and Vries and Duque (2018); and Liu et al.'s (2018) 6-item scale measured the elevation. We used the 3-item scale provided by Morgan et al. (1994) to measure the trust. In addition, consumer advocacy behavior was measured by six items, adapted from Romani et al. (2013). Finally, altruism was measured with four items from Rodriguez-Ricardo et al.'s (2019) scale. The scales went through a series of expert interviews to ensure their suitability to the Vietnamese dairy industry context.

***The covariance-based Structure Equation Model (CB-SEM)*** examines the relationship between a model's variables (Hussey & Eagan, 2007). It has been demonstrated that the method is an effective instrument for confirmatory research (Hair et al., 2017). In addition, SPSS 22 and Amos 20 are employed in combination for data processing (Dash & Paul, 2021). The analysis process is as follows:

- (1) The reliability of the individual constructs will be determined by their Cronbach Alpha indices, which are calculated using SPSS 22. The criterion of  $\alpha > 0.7$  has been utilized for assessment (Gerbing & Anderson, 1988; Peterson, 1994).
- (2) A confirmatory factor analysis is then conducted using Amos 20 (Dash & Paul, 2021). Several criteria have been employed to assess the construct's reliability and validity:
  - (i) The model fit indexes are examined (Awang et al., 2015; Hair et al., 2014), including discrepancy divided by degree of freedom

( $Cmin/df$ ) < 3; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) < 0.08; root Mean Square Residual (RMR) < 0.05; comparative fit index (CFI) > 0.9, Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) > 0.9. A well-fit model is an insurance for more accurate estimation (Hair et al., 2014).

(ii) For the construct's reliability assessment, in addition to Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ ), the Composite Reliability (C.R > 0.7) is also employed (Hair et al., 2014).

(iii) The construct's convergent validity is examined using the average variance extracted indexes ( $AVE > 0.5$ ) (Awang et al., 2015).

(iv) The constructs' discriminant validity will be evaluated based on the suggestion that the square root of factors' AVE ( $\sqrt{AVE}$ ) should be greater than the correlation between itself and the other factors (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Additionally, the factors' maximum shared variance indices (MSV) should be lower than their AVE to achieve discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2014).

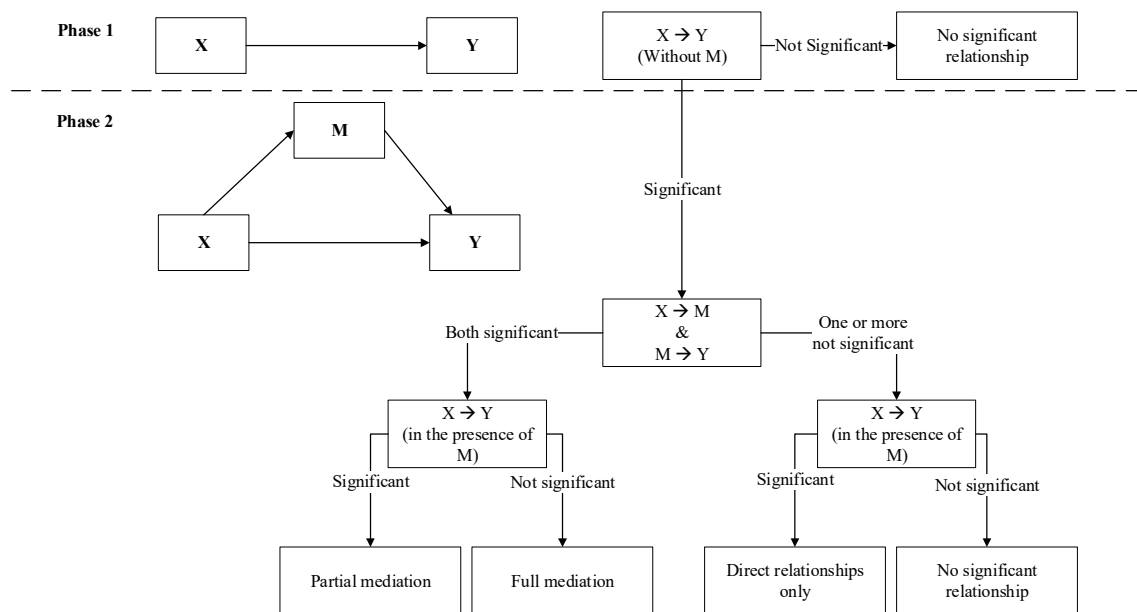
(3) The estimated model will be constructed based on the hypothesized causal relationships in the last stage. The model fit is again assessed before the estimation is carried out to examine the hypotheses (Awang et al., 2015). The relationship's p-value must be less than 0.05 to be concluded as statistically significant.

### 3.3 Mediation Analysis

The study chose Baron and Kenny's (1986) approach to analyze the mediator. In the first phase, the assessed mediator is removed to examine the relationship between independent and dependent variables. If the effect is statistically significant, the next stage will be initiated, in which the mediator will be added back into the model.

In the second phase, the study assesses the causal impact of (1) the independent variable on the mediator, (2) the mediator on the dependent variable, and (3) the independent variable on the dependent variable. Additionally, (4) an indirect bootstrap of 5000 samples is performed with 95% confidence intervals to evaluate the mediating effects independently (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). The mediator confirmation process is based on the suggestion of Zhao et al. (2010), as detailed in Figure 2. The  $p\text{-value} < 0.05$  criteria is employed to identify the significance of the examined relationship.

Figure 2. Mediation analysis process



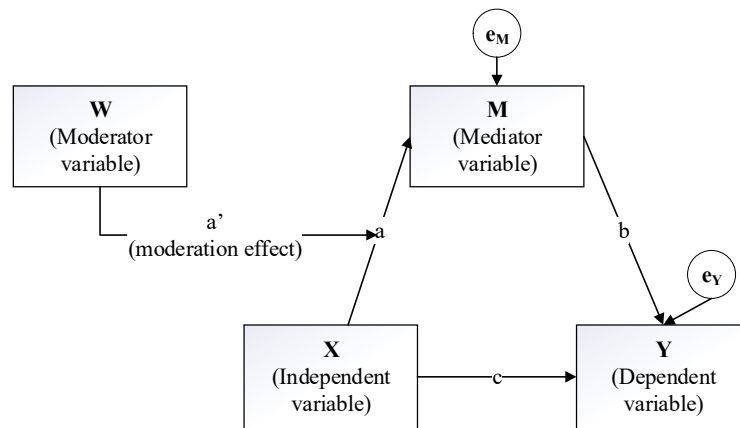
Source: Adapted from Baron and Kenny (1986) and Zhao et al. (2010)

### 3.4 Moderation Analysis

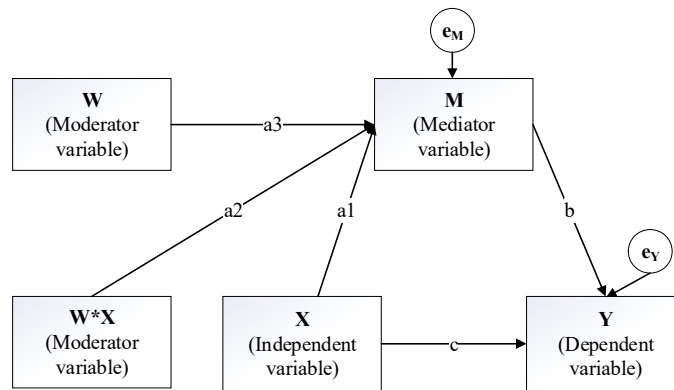
On the other hand, a causal model was used to test the moderator (Aiken & West, 1991; Cohen et al., 2003). The software SPSS 22 is then employed to standardize the model's variables. Additionally, a new variable,  $Z\_CSR\_x\_Altr$ , was then

created by multiplying the standardized CSR and Altruism variables. Finally, the aforementioned standardized variables are added back into Amos 20 to analyze the moderator effect of altruism (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Igartua & Hayes, 2021). The moderation and mediation effect can be summarized in an equation (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Method and equation for mediation and moderation estimation



**The visualization model**



**The estimation model**

Notes: The mediator equation:  $M = i_M + a_1X + a_2W + a_3WX + \epsilon_M$ . The total estimation equation:  $Y = i_Y + cX + bM + \epsilon_Y = i_Y + bi_M + (c + ba_1)X + ba_2W + ba_3WX + be_M + \epsilon_Y$ . The equation can be applied to multiple mediation and moderation models.

Source: Adapted from Igartua and Hayes (2021)

## 4. Results

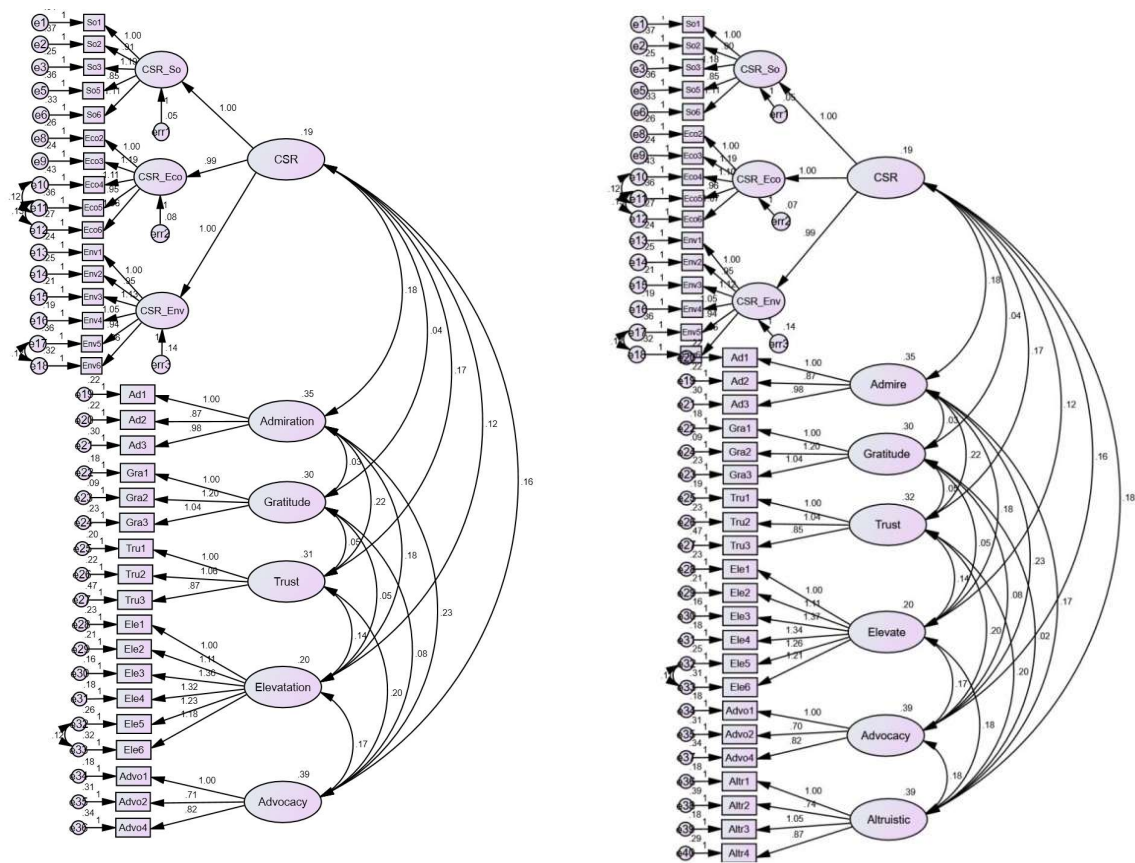
The CFA was conducted twice to ascertain the convergent scale and reliability. The first model was without the moderator, and the second was with the moderator. The model fit of the first model is:  $\chi^2 = 865.445$ ,  $\text{Cmin/df} = 1.714 < 3$ ;  $\text{RMSEA} = 0.049 < 0.08$ ;  $\text{RMR} = 0.030 < 0.05$ ;  $\text{CFI} = 0.929 > 0.9$ ;  $\text{TLI} = 0.921 > 0.9$ . The model fit of the second model is:  $\chi^2 = 1084.693$ ,  $\text{Cmin/df} = 1.703 < 3$ ;  $\text{RMSEA} = 0.049 < 0.08$ ;  $\text{RMR} = 0.031 < 0.05$ ;  $\text{CFI} = 0.923 > 0.9$ ;  $\text{TLI} = 0.915 > 0.9$ . The indicators illustrate a good fit (Hair et al., 2014; Awang et al., 2015).

### 4.1 Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity

The factor loadings were substantial and statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ), providing convincing evidence in favor of the items used to represent the constructs (Figure 4). Additionally, the Cronbach's alpha of the CSR's dimensions, including social ( $\alpha=0.807$ ), economic ( $\alpha=0.852$ ), and environment ( $\alpha=0.886$ ), as well as other variables such as admiration ( $\alpha=0.790$ ), gratitude ( $\alpha=0.860$ ), trust ( $\alpha=0.754$ ), elevation ( $\alpha=0.889$ ); advocacy ( $\alpha=0.777$ ), and altruism ( $\alpha=0.829$ ), which satisfied the cut-off criteria (Gerbing & Anderson, 1988).

Additionally, the factors' C.R indices were from 0.748 to 0.887, and the AVE indices ranged from 0.501 to 0.696 (Table 2), which satisfied the criteria of  $\text{C.R} > 0.7$  and  $\text{AVE} > 0.5$  (Hair et al., 2014; Awang et al., 2015).

Figure 4. CFA analyses for the two models with and without altruism



4.2 Construct Discriminant Validity

The factors’ MSVs are observed to be lesser than their AVEs. Additionally, the square root of the factors’ AVEs is greater than their correlation with other constructs. Therefore, the construct achieves the discriminant validity criteria (Awang et al., 2015, Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2017).

Table 2. Reliable, convergent, and discriminant validity of the constructs

Variable	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	Correlation coefficients between variables						
					Brand Advocacy	Trust	Elevation	Gratitude	CSR	Altruism	Admiration
Brand Advocacy	0.748	0.501	0.386	0.781	<b>0.708</b>						
Trust	0.761	0.519	0.500	0.786	0.564	<b>0.720</b>					

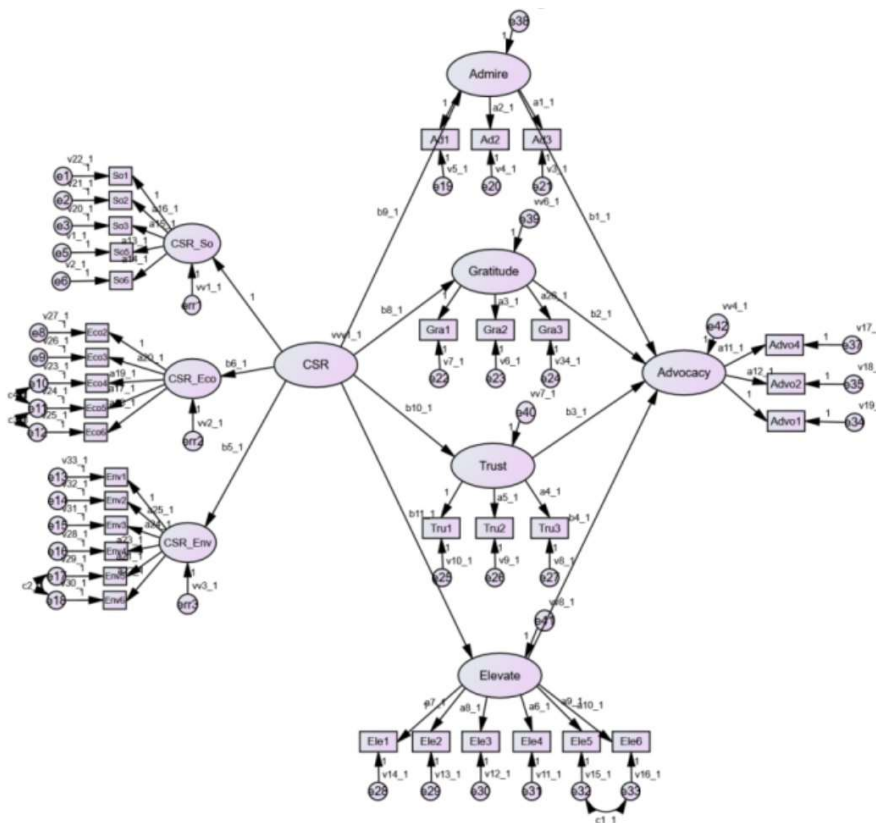
Elevation	0.887	0.567	0.462	0.895	0.616	0.562	<b>0.753</b>				
Gratitude	0.864	0.680	0.054	0.888	0.233	0.155	0.185	<b>0.824</b>			
CSR	0.872	0.696	0.518	0.887	0.599	0.707	0.632	0.165	<b>0.834</b>		
Altruism	0.834	0.561	0.456	0.859	0.462	0.558	0.638	0.071	0.675	<b>0.749</b>	
Admiration	0.794	0.562	0.518	0.796	0.621	0.656	0.680	0.089	0.720	0.468	<b>0.750</b>

Note: The numbers in bold placed on the diagonal line are  $\sqrt{AVE}$ .

### 4.3 Testing the Hypotheses

First, the estimated model's goodness of fit satisfied the criteria (Awang et al., 2015; Hair et al., 2014). The model fit indices are:  $\chi^2 = 893.855$ ;  $Cmin/df = 1.746 < 3$ ;  $p\text{-value} = 0.000$ ;  $RMSEA = 0.05 < 0.07$ ;  $RMR = 0.032 < 0.05$ ;  $CFI = 0.925 > 0.09$ ;  $TLI = 0.918 > 0.09$  (Figure 5).

Figure 5. SEM results



$\chi^2 = 893,855$ ;

$Cmin/df = 1,746$ ;

$p\text{-value} = 0,000$ ;

$RMSEA = 0,05$ ;

$RMR = 0,032$ ;

$CFI = 0,925$ ;

$TLI = 0,918$



Then, relationships between CSR, moral emotions, and brand advocacy behaviors were tested. The hypothetical relationship path coefficients are detailed in Table 3. All of the hypotheses are statistically significant ( $p\text{-value} < 0.05$ ).

The effects of CSR on moral emotions are in descending order: admiration ( $\beta=0.793$ ,  $p\text{-value}<0.001$ ), trust ( $\beta=0.757$ ,  $p\text{-value}<0.001$ ), elevation ( $\beta=0.705$ ,  $p\text{-value}<0.001$ ), and gratitude ( $\beta=0.179$ ,  $p\text{-value}=0.008$ ). The moral emotions, in turn, influence the customers' brand advocacy. The effects are in descending order: elevation ( $\beta=0.307$ ,  $p\text{-value}<0.001$ ), admiration ( $\beta=0.294$ ,  $p\text{-value}=0.001$ ), trust ( $\beta=0.199$ ,  $p\text{-value}<0.023$ ), and gratitude ( $\beta=0.121$ ,  $p\text{-value}<0.034$ ).

Table 3. Hypotheses testing results

	Hypotheses	Regression weights	Standardized regression weights	Standard deviation	Critical ratio	P-value
H1	CSR → Admiration	1.135	0.793	0.128	8.870	***
H2	CSR → Gratitude	0.231	0.179	0.087	2.643	**
H3	CSR → Trust	0.996	0.757	0.119	8.379	***
H4	CSR → Elevation	0.745	0.705	0.095	7.838	***
H5	Admiration → Advocacy	0.301	0.294	0.092	3.267	**
H6	Gratitude → Advocacy	0.137	0.121	0.065	2.115	*
H7	Trust → Advocacy	0.222	0.199	0.098	2.272	*
H8	Elevation → Advocacy	0.426	0.307	0.110	3.884	***

Notes: Significant at \*\*\*  $p\text{-value} < 0.001$ ; \*\*  $p\text{-value} < 0.01$ ; \*  $p\text{-value} < 0.05$ .

#### 4.4 Mediation Analysis

Hypothesis H9 mentions that (a) admiration, (b) gratitude, (c) trust, and (d) elevation mediate the effect of CSR on brand advocacy. Therefore, a series of mediation analyses has been processed (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Zhao et al., 2010) and detailed in Table 4. According to the results, only H9c is not statistically significant, as no mediation effect has been found with the participation of trust ( $p\text{-value}=0.150$ ) in the estimated model. The remaining hypotheses, H9a, H9b,

and H9d, are statistically supported, as admiration ( $\beta=0.197$ ,  $p\text{-value}=0.035$ ), gratitude ( $\beta=0.023$ ,  $p\text{-value}=0.03$ ), and elevation ( $\beta=0.209$ ,  $p\text{-value}<0.001$ ) have been illustrated to moderate the effect of CSR and brand advocacy.

Considering the direct effects with the existence of the mediators, in the case of gratitude, all three direct relationships are statistically significant: CSR affects gratitude ( $\beta=0.167$ ,  $p\text{-value}=0.017$ ), gratitude influences brand advocacy ( $\beta=0.136$ ,  $p\text{-value}=0.041$ ), and CSR directly impacts brand advocacy ( $\beta=0.209$ ,  $p\text{-value}=0.004$ ). It is implied that gratitude partly mediates the impact of CSR on brand advocacy (Zhao et al., 2010).

Additionally, from the admiration perspective, CSR influences customers' admiration ( $\beta=0.721$ ,  $p\text{-value}<0.001$ ), which in turn impacts brand advocacy ( $\beta=0.269$ ,  $p\text{-value}=0.021$ ); meanwhile, the impact of CSR on brand advocacy has been diminished with the participation of admiration ( $p\text{-value}=0.158$ ). From the elevation standpoint, the impact of CSR on customers' elevation has been supported ( $\beta=0.635$ ,  $p\text{-value}<0.001$ ), along with the influence of elevation to brand advocacy ( $\beta=0.328$ ,  $p\text{-value}<0.001$ ); also, the direct effect from CSR to brand advocacy is unsupported ( $p\text{-value}=0.054$ ). Therefore, it has been demonstrated that admiration and elevation fully mediate the relationship between CSR and brand advocacy (Zhao et al., 2010).

Table 4. Mediation analysis results

The relationship	Direct effect without the mediator	Direct effect with the existence of the mediator	Indirect effect	Result
<i>H9b: Admiration mediates the relationship between CSR and Brand Advocacy</i>				
CSR → Advocacy	0.291***	<i>Not significant</i>		Full mediation
CSR → Admiration		0.721***	0.197*	
Admiration → Advocacy		0.269*		
<i>H9b: Gratitude mediates the relationship between CSR and Brand Advocacy</i>				

CSR → Advocacy	0.226**	0.209**		
CSR → Gratitude		0.167*	0.023*	Partial mediation
Gratitude → Advocacy		0.136*		
<b>H9c: Trust mediates the relationship between CSR and Brand Advocacy</b>				
CSR → Advocacy	0.268***	Not significant		
CSR → Trust		0.704***	Not significant	No mediation
Trust → Advocacy		Not significant		
<b>H9d: Elevation mediates the relationship between CSR and Brand Advocacy</b>				
CSR → Advocacy	0.271***	Not significant		
CSR → Elevation		0.635*	0.209***	Full mediation
Elevation → Advocacy		0.328*		

Notes: Significant at \*\*\* p-value < 0.001; \*\*p-value < 0.01; \* p-value < 0.05.

#### 4.5 Moderation Analysis

As illustrated in Table 5, the standardized variable of Z\_CSR\_x\_Altr does not significantly affect admiration (p-value=0.492), gratitude (p-value=0.153), or trust (p-value=0.422). Therefore, the hypotheses H10a–c are not supported.

However, the moderation effect of altruism on the relationship between CSR and elevation is statistically significant ( $\beta=0.091$ , p-value=0.043). Moreover, based on the line graph of the regression equations (Figure 6), it was determined that altruism would amplify the effect of CSR on elevation. Hence, only hypothesis H10d is statistically supported.

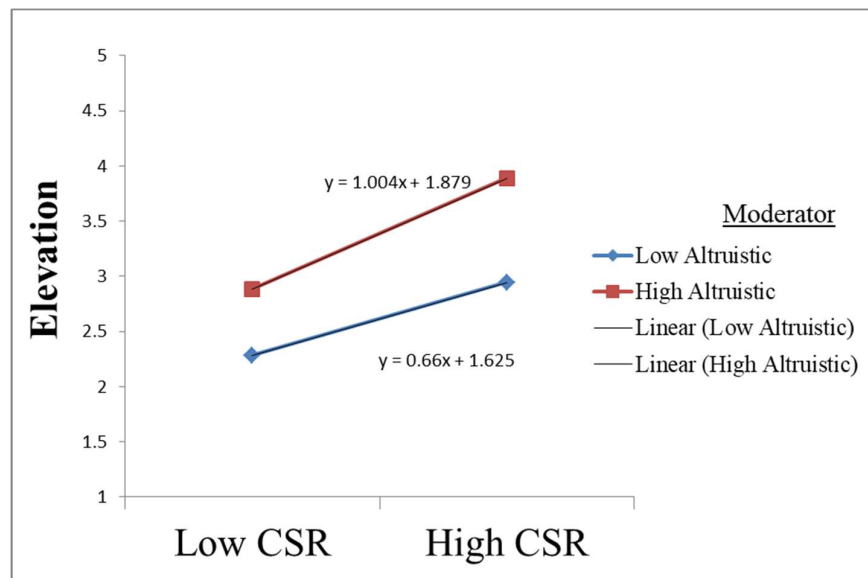
Table 5. Moderation analysis results

Relationship	Standardized regression weights	Standard error	Critical ratio	P-value	Result
<b>H10a: Altruism moderates the impact of CSR on Admiration</b>					
CSR → Admiration	0.512	0.058	8.900	***	
Altruism → Admiration	0.104	0.058	1.798	Not significant	No mediation
Z_CSR_x_Altr → Admiration	0.033	0.040	0.687	Not significant	

<i>H10b: Altruism moderates the impact of CSR on Gratitude</i>					<i>No moderation</i>
CSR → Gratitude	0.174	0.069	2.500	*	
Altruism → Gratitude	-0.023	0.070	-0.328	<i>Not significant</i>	
Z_CSR_x_Altr → Gratitude	0.082	0.048	1.429	<i>Not significant</i>	
<i>H10c: Altruism moderates the impact of CSR on Trust</i>					<i>No moderation</i>
CSR → Trust	0.404	0.059	6.852	***	
Altruism → Trust	0.201	0.059	3.408	***	
Z_CSR_x_Altr → Trust	0.039	0.041	0.803	<i>Not significant</i>	
<i>H10d: Altruism moderates the impact of CSR on Elevation</i>					Moderation's statistically significant
CSR → Elevation	0.314	0.057	7.274	***	
Altruism → Elevation	0.388	0.057	6.742	***	
Z_CSR_x_Altr → Elevation	0.091	0.030	2.841	*	

Notes: significant at \*\*\* p-value < 0.001; \*\*p-value < 0.01; \* p-value < 0.05.

Figure 6. Conditional effects of CSR on elevation



## 5. Discussion and Implications

The study investigates the influences of dairy brands' CSR activities on customers' behaviors through the mediation of moral emotions. Additionally, the variables' interactivity is also examined via the prism of customers' altruistic values, which act as the moderator. Following Fatma and Khan's (2023)

recommendations, the study considers CSR as a second-order construct with three dimensions, including social, economic, and environmental, to delve deeper into understanding the concept and further assess its effectiveness in the context of the Vietnamese dairy industry.

First, regarding the direct effects, the findings are consistent with previous research that confirmed the positive effects of customers' perceived CSR on their moral emotions, such as admiration (Cegarra-Navarro & Martínez-Martínez, 2009), gratitude (Kim & Park, 2020), trust (Berry, 1995), and elevation (Romani & Grappi, 2014), as well as the positive influences of emotions on consumer behaviors (Kervyn et al., 2012). These affirmations should be considered while developing messages in order to improve the interaction between brands and customers (Kim & Johnson, 2013). According to the results, managers should develop strategies that focus on strengthening moral feelings, which will assist consumers in identifying and associating with a company and motivating them to act in its favor. Irresponsible behavior in CSR activities leading to unfavorable moral emotions must be avoided (Xie et al., 2019). Companies should also establish a long-term CSR system instead of having short-term and frequent CSR initiatives to ensure consistency in branding activities (Luck et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the study follows the call to further consider emotions' roles in CSR research (Ketola, 2008). Although previous models focus mostly on the cognitive aspects of consumer behaviors (Lichtenstein et al., 2004), it is suggested that people respond to ethical issues with moral emotions (Haidt, 2001). Previous studies have demonstrated the mediating role of admiration (Ahmad et al., 2023), gratitude (Romani et al., 2013), and elevation (Romani & Grappi, 2014). The same effect has been illustrated in the context of the Vietnamese dairy market, as the gratitude partial mediation, as well as the admiration and elevation's full mediation effects, have been witnessed to affect

the relationship between CSR and brand advocacy. As a result, the importance of moral emotions in the research paradigm is undeniable. Therefore, we suggest that companies emphasize philanthropic and charitable activities to elevate consumers, thereby increasing positive emotional reactions and supportive brand behaviors. Additionally, in the case of admiration and elevation, it is important to acknowledge that with the participation of these two factors, CSR activities are fully mediated by the customers' moral emotions. In other words, in such a scenario, CSR activities lose their direct impact on customers' advocacy behaviors. Therefore, efforts should be invested in enhancing positive moral emotions accordingly (Romani & Grappi, 2014). Additionally, it is essential to frequently monitor consumers' emotions to take advantage of positive emotions and anticipate negative emotions' impacts (Romani et al., 2013).

Finally, customers' altruism has been illustrated to strengthen the impact of perceived CSR activities to elevation. In other words, the more altruistic customers are, the more likely they will feel elevated upon learning that the firm participates in CSR efforts (Romani et al., 2013). Therefore, managers can design messages emphasizing altruism directed at highly altruistic individuals and execute CSR campaigns to entice them into becoming the organization's public opinion leaders (Seitel, 2017). Since altruism is a noble value (Hartmann et al., 2017), managers should build CSR projects with a humanitarian purpose (Cegarra-Navarro & Martínez-Martínez, 2009). They should also undertake genuine CSR activities and resist the urge to exploit consumer generosity for business gain (He & Harris, 2020), which could lead to negative emotions (Deng & Long, 2020). Such impact will be amplified by the customers' altruistic personality, resulting in unexpected negative emotions and behaviors.

## **6. Limitations and Future Agenda**

As with any other research, the study contains limitations. First, brand is a complex concept with multiple approaches, such as brand image, brand strength, brand trust, or brand association (Górska-Warsewicz et al., 2021). Future research can expand the model by incorporating additional brand aspects, as this will strengthen our understanding of the moral emotions' influence on branding activities in the CSR context. Second, the research sample is limited, with only 298 respondents. It was also conducted briefly in Vietnam; future studies need to evaluate the generalizability when expanding the research scope to other Vietnamese areas and cities. Third, the research is limited to the dairy industry. It analyzes the psychological aspects of choosing products from reliable dairy brands but has not comprehensively understood the impact of CSR on other fields. Therefore, future studies can expand the research scope to other CSR-related industries to examine the influence of CSR on the success of present-day organizations. Since the study indicates a mediating role of elevation in the relationship between CSR and brand advocacy, future research can examine this relationship further. Moreover, along with the research of Lichtenstein et al. (2004), Mael and Ashforth (1992), and Schwartz (1992), data on the moderating role of altruism also offers a direction for analyzing how personality traits affect the effectiveness of CSR in customer behavior.

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