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The potential of CSR engagement in UK SMEs

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, there has been a notable interest surrounding the corporate social responsibility (CSR) of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). However, unlike larger corporations, SMEs often lack the resources to develop comprehensive CSR strategies or dedicated departments. In light of this, it becomes crucial to focus on the role of individual decision makers in driving CSR engagement within SMEs. Drawing on insights from 219 UK entrepreneurs and objective performance data, we reveal the significance of personal values and competencies in shaping CSR initiatives and the importance of perceived employee supportiveness within the firm in strengthening CSR efforts. By highlighting the importance of individual-level factors and a supportive culture for entrepreneurs, we offer valuable insights for practitioners aiming to enhance CSR activities in their SMEs. Furthermore, we emphasize the positive impact of CSR engagement on various aspects of performance, encouraging entrepreneurs to consider proactive engagement in CSR.

KEYWORDS

CSR engagement; personal values; entrepreneurial competence; perceived employee supportiveness; SME performance

Introduction

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are increasingly recognized as crucial for “delivering sustainable and inclusive growth” (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2019, p. 3). This recognition is reflected in noticeable shifts in corporate social responsibility (CSR) research toward smaller businesses, moving away from its previous focus on large, global corporations (Bikefe et al., 2020; George et al., 2020; Ortiz-Avram et al., 2018). The business context for SMEs is personal, and most times, entrepreneurs are inseparable from their ventures, often embedding their values and views in their business practices (Fuller & Tian, 2006). At the same time, unlike their larger counterparts, SMEs often lack the resources and formal structures to implement extensive CSR policies or dedicated sustainability management systems (Osagie et al., 2016). In these resource-constrained settings, where entrepreneurs are more intimately connected with their firms (Jenkins, 2009) and have

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stronger decision power, the importance of individual entrepreneurial values and competencies in shaping CSR activities becomes clear (Tian & Robertson, 2019). After all, entrepreneurs make choices related to their ventures aligned with their moral compasses and capabilities all the time (Jenkins, 2009). This raises the question: What role do personal values and competencies of entrepreneurs play in championing CSR practices within their SMEs?

Additionally, for SME entrepreneurs looking to engage in CSR, recognizing the boundaries of such strategies becomes crucial. Existing research provides limited insights into the conditioning effects that can strengthen or diminish the scope of SME CSR engagement (Galbreath, 2010; Zou et al., 2021). It thus becomes essential to ask what factors enable or hinder effective CSR integration within an SME. This understanding will provide a clear roadmap for SME practitioners to develop and navigate their CSR initiatives harmoniously. Moreover, it is important for entrepreneurs to recognize the value-creating potential of CSR engagement and the unique opportunities it presents to balance long-term success and equity (Porter & Kramer, 2019). While existing research has primarily focused on the financial benefits of CSR (Flammer, 2015), the broader social and environmental impacts of CSR remain unclear. Studying more comprehensive sets of outcomes may support entrepreneurs' awareness of CSR's value creation potential across business, social, and environmental outcomes (Kraus et al., 2020). Failing to do so may lead to missed opportunities for charting a sustainable course for SMEs. Thus, we ask: What are the broader business, social, and environmental outcomes of CSR engagement for SMEs?

We turn to the motivation–opportunity–ability (MOA) theory (Blumberg & Pringle, 1982) to help answer these questions. Specifically, we investigate how entrepreneurs motivated by self- and other-regarding values, enabled by entrepreneurial competence, and contingent on the opportunities created by their perception of employee supportiveness engage in CSR activities to improve their business, social, and environmental outcomes. We examine two categories of personal entrepreneurial values (Agle et al., 1999) to explain their differential effect on CSR engagement in established SMEs (Choongo et al., 2018).

We illustrate the importance of entrepreneurial competence (Lans et al., 2011) for CSR engagement, thus considering the spillovers of psychological processes (for example, beliefs, affects, and attitudes) and cognitive perceptions of entrepreneurs to the firm level (Chaston & Sadler-Smith, 2011). We further offer insights on how, to entrepreneurs, a CSR-enabling environment can be fostered by perceived employee supportiveness (Slack et al., 2015). Finally, we confirm the value-creating CSR advantage and the positive effect across business, social, and environmental performance outcomes (Anser et al., 2020).

Literature review and hypotheses

CSR engagement, a widely researched concept, is defined as the deliberate actions and procedures implemented by businesses to address societal and environmental concerns beyond legal mandates and immediate financial interests (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001; Oberseder et al., 2011). This engagement reflects an organization's ongoing commitment to ethical behavior, economic development, and stakeholder well-being. For SMEs, the nature of CSR engagement often follows a microlevel trajectory, as ownership structures typically suggests that SME owners make strategic decisions with less external pressures. Considering the emphasis on internal organizational factors for SME decision-makers, MOA theory provides a valuable lens for understanding CSR engagement in SMEs.

MOA theory (MacInnis et al., 1991) emphasizes three fundamental characteristics that determine the performance of individuals or organizations—namely, their motivation, opportunity, and ability (Blumberg & Pringle, 1982). We theorize that CSR engagement in SMEs is a combined function of MOA-related factors in the following way: while individual-level characteristics of entrepreneurs, such as their motivation and ability, drive CSR engagement, the strength of these initiatives is contingent on firm-level opportunities determined by the entrepreneur's perception of employee supportiveness.

Motivation, or the willingness to engage in particular activities (MacInnis et al., 1991), is denoted by the personal values of entrepreneurs in our study. The values spectrum distinguishes between self-regarding values, which are oriented toward the individual, and other-regarding values, oriented toward society at large (Agle et al., 1999).

Entrepreneurs guided by self-regarding values, who prioritize goals aimed at enhancing their self-interest, tend to place less emphasis on advancing social welfare through advocacy for social and environmental causes. Fukukawa et al. (2007) indicated that self-regarding entrepreneurs typically view societal outcomes as less important, in contrast to their other-regarding counterparts who are motivated by altruistic principles. The negative role of self-regarding values is often manifested through favoring strategies aligned with self-enhancement, at the expense of CSR (Fritzsche & Oz, 2007), which is why entrepreneurs with strong self-regarding values are less likely to engage in CSR due to the monetary efforts involved and the absence of direct, personal benefits (Schwartz & Bardi, 2001).

On the contrary, entrepreneurs with other-regarding values are typically more likely to engage in CSR (Santos, 2011). Research shows that SME founders can display motives other than profit (Fassin et al., 2015), and entrepreneurs who exhibit values related to helpfulness, equality, and compassion are more likely to be committed to the welfare of others through their CSR engagement (Williams & Schaefer, 2013). Hemingway and MacLagan

(2004) acknowledged the link between other-regarding values and CSR engagement, showing that stronger forms of CSR may stem from an entrepreneur's capacity for empathy. Thus:

H1: Self-regarding values of entrepreneurs are negatively related to CSR engagement in their SMEs.

H2: Other-regarding values of entrepreneurs are positively related to CSR engagement in their SMEs.

The *ability* required to perform particular actions (MacInnis et al., 1991) reflects the competencies with which entrepreneurs are equipped. Competent entrepreneurs may try and explore ways to address social and environmental needs through entrepreneurial activities (Akhtar et al., 2018), recognizing the benefits of CSR engagement (Ploum et al., 2018). Entrepreneurial competence enhances the understanding of the importance of caring for the environment, society, and gaining a good business reputation (Smith et al., 2012). Thus, skilled entrepreneurs are expected to realize that a hands-on approach to CSR engagement is advantageous to their firm, therefore:

H3: Entrepreneurial competence is positively related to CSR engagement in SMEs.

CSR can deliver multifaceted value-creating outcomes for SMEs (Le et al., 2021). CSR has been framed as a strategic priority and source of improved business performance that can enable SMEs to streamline their production capabilities in more sustainable ways (Porter & Kramer, 2019). CSR engagement can promote long-term beneficial outcomes; for instance, higher efficiency and cost reductions (Jenkins, 2009) and profitability for these firms (Jain et al., 2016; Park et al., 2017). Research has also pointed out positive outcomes including consumer-company identification (Pérez, 2009), purchase decisions (Hanaysha, 2018), and long-term effects like loyalty (Pérez & Rodríguez Del Bosque, 2015).

Due to the distinctive role SMEs play in their communities, the positive effects of CSR engagement also span beyond business-related benefits to include more intangible benefits such as social performance outcomes. SMEs are often deeply embedded in the social fabric of their surroundings (Pillai et al., 2022), whereby entrepreneurial activity can help build and improve local settings, creating significant social performance outcomes (Rindova et al., 2009). More strategic forms of CSR engagement are less likely to be abandoned by SMEs and can translate into positive outcomes

for firm employees and the communities in which the SME operates (Prahalad, 2005).

Similarly, CSR can also play a key role in a firm's environmental performance (Anser et al., 2020), helping enhance the sustainability performance of SMEs (Dey et al., 2020). When entrepreneurs place a stronger emphasis on CSR engagement, they are also more likely to consider their long-term environmental impacts and act from a position of care for the environment and its resources. For instance, Chuang and Huang (2018) showed that environmental CSR significantly improves environmental impacts for firms, while Anser et al. (2020) acknowledged that CSR commitment and participation play a determining role in a firm's environmental performance. Overall, when SMEs actively engage in CSR, they become more conscious of their social and environmental impacts and motivated to take actions, ultimately driving performance within their operations. Thus:

H4: CSR engagement is positively related to (a) business performance, (b) social performance, and (c) environmental performance of SMEs.

Opportunity captures the contextual conditions that facilitate the realization of specific outcomes (MacInnis et al., 1991). Perceived employee supportiveness (Slack et al., 2015; Wei & Morgan, 2004) reflects the opportunity that conditions the relationship between personal values (motivation), competence (ability), and perceived CSR engagement.

On one hand, entrepreneurs who perceive support from employees and are motivated by self-regarding values might be less inclined to engage in CSR (Schwartz & Bardi, 2001). Often, a strong need of employees to fit in a work environment can serve as a priority over important external issues (Sheedy et al., 2021), such as the concern about the welfare of others; hence, the offer of support to even an overly self-centered entrepreneur (Hemingway, 2005). Thus, when such entrepreneurs perceive their employees are supportive of their core business decisions, they may not see a pressing need to invest time and resources into noncore activities such as CSR, which could be viewed as nonessential and costly (Fukukawa et al., 2007). Conversely, entrepreneurs who feel supported by their employees and are guided by other-regarding values may be more inclined to enhance their engagement in CSR, motivated by a genuine concern for the welfare of others (Schultz et al., 2005; Schwartz et al., 2000). A supportive climate is likely to improve entrepreneurs' well-being and functioning at work (Berson et al., 2008), and thus intensify this concern about others (Tang et al., 2017). Therefore, when positive employee experiences reinforce other-regarding entrepreneurs' inclination to care for others, their commitment to CSR may be further strengthened, resulting in improved CSR engagement (Berson et al., 2008).

Perceived employee support may also significantly enhance decision-making outcomes for competent entrepreneurs. When entrepreneurs feel supported by their employees, they gain confidence in their capabilities (Lans et al., 2011), influencing their actions positively. Therefore, competent entrepreneurs who perceive support of their employees are likely to engage in CSR initiatives through their entrepreneurial activities (Moore et al., 2009). This increased confidence may drive their involvement in CSR, as they may recognize the potential benefits of such endeavors for the firm (Ploum et al., 2018).

H5: Perceived employee supportiveness strengthens the relationships of (a) self-regarding values of entrepreneurs, (b) other-regarding values of entrepreneurs, and (c) entrepreneurial competence with CSR engagement in their SMEs.

Methodology

To address our research questions, we collected the data from entrepreneurs of SMEs in the United Kingdom. Respondents were recruited using Qualtrics Panel Services (Goodman & Paolacci, 2017), applying a set of eligibility criteria: founders or cofounders of the company with up to 250 employees and established business operations for at least one year, from a range of industries to allow diversity in the data, as well as to account for any industry-related factors that might be of additional interest. We have applied Standard Industrial Classification industry codes for the companies in our sample (Office for National Statistics, 2022).

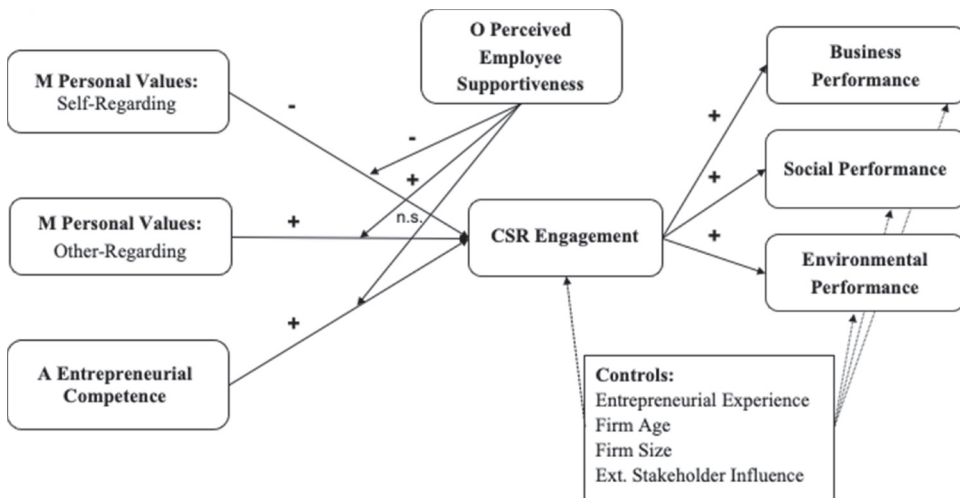
A structured questionnaire with all the measures taken from the extant literature (see Table 1 for all variable measurements and descriptive statistics) and a cover letter targeting entrepreneurs of SMEs in the United Kingdom were developed. To enhance response and obtain quality data, we also performed a post hoc test for evaluating informant competency in this survey (Kumar et al., 1993), by looking at their knowledgeability, involvement, and confidence (means ranged between 5.74 to 5.84, suggesting key informant competency in this research).

We excluded the concern for nonresponse bias by comparing early and late respondents using a *t*-test procedure (Armstrong & Overton, 1977), suggesting no significant differences. To limit potential common method bias (CMB), we used a series of preventative techniques—that is, using established multi-item scales that were carefully adapted to our context (Chang et al., 2010)—and placing construct items under general topic sections to preclude respondents from identifying specific constructs or speculating about links between them. Regarding statistical remedies, we employed a marker variable test to

Table 1. Descriptive measures and correlations.

	<i>a</i>	Mean	SD	AVE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	
1 Self-regarding values	0.86	5.33	1.21	0.67	-															
2 Other-regarding values	0.91	5.29	1.17	0.71	0.729**	-														
3 Entrepreneurial competence	0.92	5.40	0.99	0.80	0.612**	0.568**	-													
4 CSR engagement	0.88	5.22	1.23	0.82	0.313**	0.471**	0.468**	-												
5 Perceived employee support	0.88	5.54	0.90	0.59	0.350**	0.443**	0.548**	0.381**	-											
6 Business performance	0.95	5.21	0.98	0.52	0.278**	0.368**	0.420**	0.459**	0.450**	-										
7 Social performance	0.72	5.47	0.84	0.50	0.179**	0.328**	0.346**	0.671**	0.351**	0.325**	-									
8 Environmental performance	0.89	5.85	0.85	0.57	0.256**	0.420**	0.503**	0.521**	0.504**	0.545**	0.609**	-								
9 Entrepreneurial experience	-	14.19	13.01	-	0.073	-0.053	0.088	-0.163	0.041	-0.158*	-0.134*	-0.019	-							
10 Firm size	0.90	65.73	66.68	-	0.006	0.002	0.027	0.171*	0.015	0.064	0.136*	0.103	0.061	-						
11 Firm age	-	12.24	9.87	-	0.109	0.003	0.142*	-0.044	0.013	-0.137*	-0.034	-0.024	0.569**	0.048	-					
12 External stakeholder influence	0.86	4.58	1.30	0.61	0.200**	0.298**	0.261**	0.589**	0.213**	0.461**	0.455**	0.412**	-0.209**	0.214**	-0.186**	-				
13 Manufacturing industry	-	-	-	-	0.105	0.109	0.062	0.128	-0.049	0.119	0.145*	0.104	-0.079	0.147*	-0.069	0.159*	-			
14 Services industry	-	-	-	-	-0.105	-0.109	-0.062	-0.128	0.049	-0.119	-0.145*	-0.104	0.079	-0.147*	0.069	-0.158*	-1.00**	-		
15 Marker variable	-	-	-	-	-0.088	-0.060	-0.050	0.174*	-0.067	0.085	0.303**	0.063	-0.166*	0.154*	-0.132	0.234**	0.288**	-0.288**	-	

Note. ****p* < .001; ***p* < .01; **p* < .05. AVE = Average Variance Extracted.



M denoted the motivation component; *O* – the opportunity component, and *A* denotes the ability component of MOA; n.s. stands for non-significant.

Figure 1. Research framework.

empirically assess CMB (Lindell & Whitney, 2001), where all the significant bivariate correlations among our key predictors and outcomes maintained their statistical significance. We further controlled for selection bias and endogeneity using Heckman's two-step estimation (1979), offering tentative support for the lack of endogeneity risks in our study.

Of the participants, 84 (38.4 percent) were female and 135 (61.6 percent) male; 112 were founders and 107 cofounders of the SME. On average, firm age was 12.24 years ($SD = 5.53$) and firm size 65.73 employees ($SD = 31.25$). Of the entrepreneurs, 131 (59.9 percent) had a university degree, average age 41.53 years old, and 14.19 years of entrepreneurial experience ($SD = 6.90$). Approximately 73 percent of firms were from service sectors (for example, consulting, education, hospitality, real estate), and 27 percent operated in manufacturing industries (for example, furniture, metal construction, technological development, textiles; see Figure 1).

Findings

Having assessed the suitability of our measures (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988) as well as the internal and external validity of the study (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012), including endogeneity, structural equation modeling in Equations With Software was used for data analysis purposes. The measurement model results suggested a good fit and a structural model was then run to assess the research framework (see Figure 2), which yielded significant goodness-of-fit indices.

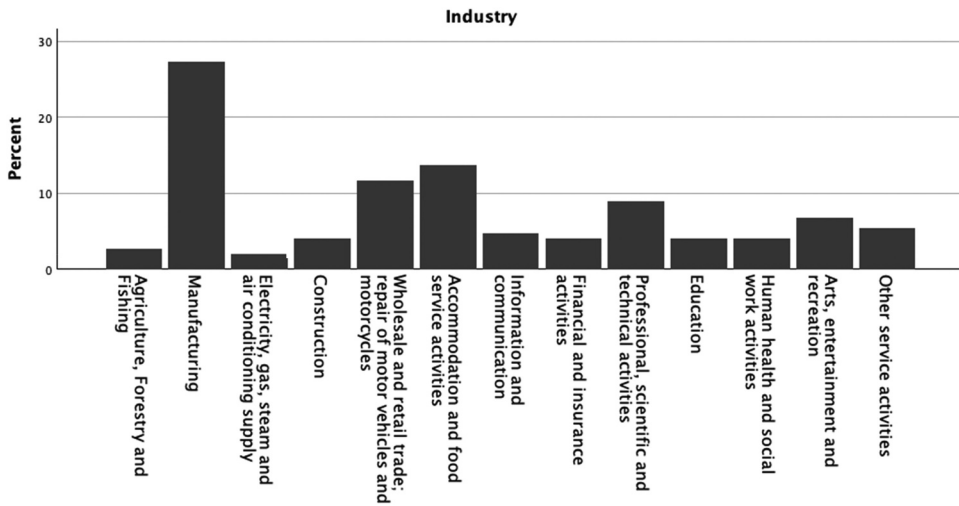


Figure 2. Industry composition of the sample.

We applied the elliptical reweighted least squares estimation procedure due to its ability to produce unbiased parameter estimates for multivariate data (Sharma et al., 1989).

Our findings (see Table 2) indicate that entrepreneurs with self-regarding values are less likely to engage in CSR activities within their firm ($b = -0.16, p < .05$), yet there is a strong positive association between other-regarding values of entrepreneurs and CSR engagement ($b = 0.18, p < .05$). Therefore, entrepreneurs who prioritize self-enhancement are less likely to engage in CSR, as their concern for the welfare of others may fall into conflict with more immediate, self-oriented needs. This suggests that self-regarding values may obstruct CSR engagement (Fritzsche & Oz, 2007), while other-regarding values and altruistic reasons may motivate CSR action (Hemingway & Maclagan, 2004). Entrepreneurial competence is a strong predictor of CSR engagement ($b = 0.28, p < .05$), showing that entrepreneurs equipped with analytical, pursuing, and networking skills are better able to recognize the benefits of CSR engagement for their SMEs (Smith et al., 2012). We also reveal that CSR engagement is positively related to business performance ($b = 0.47, p < .05$), social performance ($b = 0.54, p < .05$), and environmental performance ($b = 0.57, p < .05$). Our findings provide support to the argument that CSR engagement can deliver multifaceted, value-creating outcomes for SMEs (Le et al., 2021).

Interestingly, the effect of perceived employee supportiveness and self-regarding values on CSR engagement is negative ($b = -0.36, p < .05$), particularly when perceived employee supportiveness levels are high. Thus, entrepreneurs driven by self-regarding values become even less likely to engage in CSR when supported by their employees. This concerning result can be explained by the notion of blind support or blind trust in

Table 2. Structural model results.

	Standardized coefficients (β)	t-values
Direct effects		
H1: Self-regarding values \rightarrow CSR engagement	-0.16**	-3.14
H2: Other-regarding values \rightarrow CSR engagement	0.18**	3.91
H3: Entrepreneurial competence \rightarrow CSR engagement	0.28**	4.10
H4a: CSR engagement \rightarrow Business performance	0.47**	4.75
H4b: CSR engagement \rightarrow Social performance	0.54**	6.42
H4c: CSR engagement \rightarrow Environmental performance	0.57**	6.71
Perceived employee supportiveness \rightarrow CSR engagement	0.12	1.76
Moderating effects		
H5a: Perceived employee supportiveness \times self-regarding values \rightarrow CSR Engagement	-0.36**	-2.32
H5b: Perceived employee supportiveness \times other-regarding values \rightarrow CSR Engagement	0.29**	2.41
H5c: Perceived employee supportiveness \times entrepreneurial competence \rightarrow CSR Engagement	0.11	1.73
Control paths		
Entrepreneurial experience \rightarrow CSR engagement	-0.29**	-2.30
Entrepreneurial experience \rightarrow Business performance	0.22**	2.08
Entrepreneurial experience \rightarrow Social performance	0.32**	2.18
Entrepreneurial experience \rightarrow Environmental performance	-0.06	0.36
Firm size \rightarrow CSR engagement	0.10	1.40
Firm size \rightarrow Business performance	-0.10	-1.32
Firm size \rightarrow Social performance	-0.02	0.30
Firm size \rightarrow Environmental performance	-0.05	-0.01
Firm age \rightarrow CSR engagement	0.23**	2.22
Firm age \rightarrow Business performance	-0.22**	-2.09
Firm age \rightarrow Social performance	-0.21**	-2.12
Firm age \rightarrow Environmental performance	0.11	1.28
External stakeholder influence \rightarrow CSR engagement	0.39**	7.32
External stakeholder influence \rightarrow Business performance	0.01	0.08
External stakeholder influence \rightarrow Social performance	0.23**	3.30
External stakeholder influence \rightarrow Environmental performance	-0.01	-0.02
Industry type \rightarrow CSR engagement	-0.09	-0.50
Industry type \rightarrow Business performance	-0.07	-0.44
Industry type \rightarrow Social performance	0.03	0.09
Industry type \rightarrow Environmental performance	-0.01	-0.01

Fit indices: $\chi^2 = 1226.95$, $df = 531$, $\chi^2/df = 2.31$; $p < .001$; NFI = .99, NNFI = .99, CFI = .99; RMSEA = 0.08.

$R^2_1 = .66$; $R^2_2 = .46$; $R^2_3 = .73$, $R^2_4 = .68$.

** $p < .05$; * $p < .1$.

Boldface indicates hypotheses that are statistically significant.

one's superior or leader (Chen et al., 2002). When entrepreneurs do not feel challenged by employees, they may be less inclined to question the default ways of doing business (Sheedy et al., 2021). On the other hand, we find that a higher level of perceived employee supportiveness increases the positive effect of other-regarding values on CSR engagement ($b = 0.29$, $p < .05$). This means that entrepreneurs who hold other-regarding values and perceive support from their employees are more inclined to increase the CSR involvement within their firms. Both sets of results imply that when entrepreneurs feel supported, the relationship between their personal values and CSR engagement becomes stronger, regardless of whether they hold self-regarding or other-regarding values.

Finally, contrary to our expectations, perceived employee supportiveness is not significant in the relationship between entrepreneurial competence

Table 3. Assessment of hypothesized relationships.

Hypothesis		Outcome
1	Self-regarding values of entrepreneurs are negatively related to CSR engagement	Accepted
2	Other-regarding values of entrepreneurs are positively related to CSR engagement	Accepted
3	Entrepreneurial competence is positively related to CSR engagement	Accepted
4	a. CSR engagement is positively related to business performance	Accepted
	b. CSR engagement is positively related to social performance	Accepted
	c. CSR engagement is positively related to environmental performance	Accepted
5	a. Perceived employee supportiveness strengthens the relationship of self-regarding values of entrepreneurs with CSR engagement in their SMEs	Accepted
	b. Perceived employee supportiveness strengthens the relationship of other-regarding values of entrepreneurs with CSR engagement in their SMEs	Accepted
	c. Perceived employee supportiveness strengthens the relationships of entrepreneurial competence with CSR engagement in their SMEs	Rejected

and CSR engagement ($b = 0.11, p > .05$). Competent entrepreneurs, regardless of their perception of employee support, are likely to understand the importance of engaging in CSR (Ploum et al., 2018). This is because competence serves as a prerequisite for performance, and opportunities can only be capitalized on when there is sufficient ability (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013). These entrepreneurs tend to make informed decisions about CSR engagement and create various opportunities for themselves (Baron, 2006; Lans et al., 2011). Table 3 displays a complete assessment of hypothesized relationships.

Results also revealed that more experienced entrepreneurs are better able to manage their businesses (Unger et al., 2011) but, paradoxically, less likely to consider engaging in CSR. Younger entrepreneurs are generally more ethical in their worldview (Ede et al., 2000), but, as their experience grows, there may be tensions between prioritizing immediate versus long-term strategic decisions. We investigated the levels of CSR engagement and business, social, and environmental performance across industries and found a statistically significant difference between manufacturing and services companies for CSR engagement ($Z = -1.90, p < .10$). Manufacturing companies exhibited higher CSR engagement (mean = 5.48) compared to services companies (mean = 5.13). A similar pattern ($t_{(217)} = 2.15, p < .05$) was evidenced with higher social performance for manufacturing companies (mean = 5.49) versus services firms (mean = 5.16), suggesting that manufacturing companies, with often broader impacts, might be more engaged in CSR and achieve higher social performance. Subsample analysis revealed that for both manufacturing and services SMEs the results were significant in a similar direction ($p < .05$), with the only difference being that the relationship between CSR engagement and business performance was stronger for manufacturing companies ($b = 0.56, p < .05$) than for services companies ($b = 0.31, p < .05$). This suggests that manufacturing companies may perceive higher business returns from CSR engagement.

Implications, limitations, and future research

Our study contributed to the relatively limited body of knowledge on CSR in SMEs (Akhtar et al., 2018; Gond et al., 2017). By adopting the MOA theoretical perspective, our research widens the scope of drivers for CSR engagement, including the differential effects of personal values (Choongo et al., 2018; Williams & Schaefer, 2013) and entrepreneurial competence (Lans et al., 2011). We further add to existing knowledge on CSR boundary conditions (Galbreath, 2010) by exploring how perceived employee supportiveness strengthens or weakens the magnitude of these relationships (Wei & Morgan, 2004). Finally, we contribute to the research by uncovering the positive effects of CSR engagement on the business performance of SMEs (Bikefe et al., 2020). We also reveal broader, value-creating outcomes for society and the environment (Porter & Kramer, 2019) outlining opportunities for SMEs to deliver sustainable and inclusive growth.

From a practical viewpoint, having a deeper understanding of individual-level drivers of CSR engagement can be beneficial for SMEs and entrepreneurs. For other-regarding entrepreneurs, following their values opens promising opportunities to implement more sustainable practices aimed at creating a societal difference. When entrepreneurs' personal values align with CSR, they can become sustainability champions by taking positive individual and collective actions. Given the role of other-regarding values for CSR engagement, nurturing and deploying altruistic values should be a key priority for SME entrepreneurs. Results also provide meaningful insights for self-regarding entrepreneurs. Because values are not fixed and can evolve over time, business ethics education programs, networking events, and collaborating with social entrepreneurs could foster a positive shift toward more other-regarding values for these entrepreneurs.

Considering the role of competence for CSR engagement, entrepreneurs are advised to actively invest both monetary and nonmonetary resources to improve their analytical, networking, and pursuing skills, as these determine their ability to recognize and act on the potential benefits of CSR engagement. Specifically, entrepreneurs are encouraged to continuously advance their professional training, stay up to date with industry insights, attend specialized events in their field, and cultivate their self-development and growth. Concerning the conditioning effects of perceived employee supportiveness, we suggest that other-regarding entrepreneurs continue nurturing relationships with employees even further, as employee supportiveness facilitates socioenvironmental actions. Conversely, for entrepreneurs motivated by self-regarding values, we suggest actively listening to the views and opinions of their employees on important decisions concerning CSR.

Finally, the positive outcomes of CSR should motivate and encourage entrepreneurs to implement CSR practices in their ventures. One way of

doing this is by emphasizing the sustained competitive advantage that CSR creates. The positive effect on SME performance shows that CSR engagement is a viable strategy that does not hinder the short- or long-term success of firms. CSR engagement can drive both business and broader outcomes. A way to promote the application of CSR across the SME sector could be by framing CSR engagement as a mutually beneficial strategy for business, social, and environmental outcomes.

While our article focuses on a developed market (the United Kingdom), the findings may still be relevant for developing countries due to the specific nature of SMEs and similar challenges entrepreneurs face across geographical settings. Irrespective of location, entrepreneurs shape their firms in ways that reflect their personal characteristics, skills, and experiences (Schlierer et al., 2012). Entrepreneurs guide the decision-making processes of ventures, influence organizational goals (Holland & Shepherd, 2013), inform the allocation of resources (Schindehutte & Morris, 2001), and impact firm performance (Ling et al., 2007), as well as the survival and success of the venture (Gorgievski et al., 2011). SMEs form the backbone of local economies, and understanding how personal values, competence, and employee supportiveness foster CSR engagement for SME founders could significantly impact economic, social, and environmental progress locally. By demonstrating that CSR can be a win-win strategy, this study may encourage more SMEs in developing countries where businesses often struggle to balance profitability with social and environmental responsibilities to adopt sustainable practices, potentially leading to improved business outcomes, social benefits, and environmental protection.

However, it is important to note that the specific forms that CSR engagement takes may vary across different developed and developing countries due to unique cultural, economic, and institutional factors (Jamali et al., 2017). Thus, this study is not without limitations. The relatively small sample size and focus on a single developed country (UK) may limit the generalizability of the results across contexts. This brings opportunities for future research to consider expanding the study to developing markets, where the dynamics of CSR engagement may differ due to a combination of internal and external factors. At the same time, the reliance on self-reported data from SME founders omits the perspective of other key stakeholders, such as employees; thus, future research could consider additional viewpoints. As such, while this work provides a valuable starting point, future research that is tailored to developing countries is necessary to fully understand the scope and unique characteristics of CSR engagement across diverse contexts and from different perspectives. Despite these limitations, we provide valuable insights into CSR engagement in SMEs, for practitioners and researchers alike.

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