



Trapped from within:
Effect of CSR perceptions on consumer trust as a
justification of car dependency

The case of the German automotive industry

Nora Hellmich

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Title: Trapped from within: Effect of CSR perceptions on consumer trust as a justification of car dependency - The case of the German automotive industry

Abstract: The effectiveness of companies' CSR actions is strongly linked to their underlying motivations behind the action. Considering the four types of attributions (value-driven, stakeholder-driven, strategic and egoistic) as essential factors for evaluating how consumers perceive CSR initiatives, this research aims to fill a significant gap by examining 1) how CSR attributions influence consumer trust in German automotive companies and 2) how car dependency moderates the impact of CSR attributions on consumer trust. The results of Structural Equation Modeling, Multiple Linear Regression and Analysis of Covariances reveal that value-driven and stakeholder-driven attributions have strong positive effects on consumer trust. While strategic-driven CSR attribution does not have any influence on trust, egoistic CSR attribution is influencing consumer trust negatively. Further, the results indicate that car dependency does have a significant moderating effect on solely stakeholder-driven CSR attribution and trust. This study provides meaningful implications for the industry, as it illustrates the changes in consumer perceptions and underscores the importance of aligning CSR actions with companies' values and stakeholder engagement. A particular focus on loyal, strong car-dependent customers is crucial for building and maintaining trust.

Título: Preso por dentro: Efeito das percepções de RSE na confiança do consumidor como justificção da dependência do automóvel - O caso da indústria automóvel alemã

Resumo: A eficácia das ações de RSE das empresas está fortemente ligada às motivações subjacentes a essas ações. Considerando os quatro tipos de atribuições (orientadas para o valor, orientadas para as partes interessadas, estratégicas e egoístas) como factores essenciais para avaliar a forma como os consumidores percebem as iniciativas de RSE, esta investigação visa colmatar uma lacuna significativa, examinando 1) a forma como as atribuições de RSE influenciam a confiança dos consumidores nas empresas automóveis alemãs e 2) a forma como a dependência do automóvel modera o impacto das atribuições de RSE na confiança dos consumidores. Os resultados da Modelação de Equações Estruturais, da Regressão Linear Múltipla e da Análise de Covariâncias revelam que as atribuições orientadas para o valor e orientadas para as partes interessadas têm fortes efeitos positivos na confiança dos consumidores. Enquanto a atribuição de RSE orientada para a estratégia não tem qualquer influência na confiança, a atribuição de RSE egoísta está a influenciar negativamente a confiança dos consumidores. Além disso, os resultados indicam que a dependência do automóvel tem um efeito moderador significativo apenas na atribuição de RSE orientada para as partes interessadas e na confiança. Este estudo tem implicações significativas para a indústria, uma vez que ilustra as mudanças nas percepções dos consumidores e sublinha a importância de alinhar as ações de RSE com os valores das empresas e o envolvimento das partes interessadas. Um enfoque particular nos clientes fiéis e dependentes de automóveis é crucial para construir e manter a confiança.

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Table of Contents

List of abbreviations.....	VI
List of Figures.....	VII
List of Tables.....	VII
1. Introduction.....	1
1.1 Problem Definition and Relevance.....	1
1.2 Research Question and Structure.....	3
2. Theoretical Discussion and Hypothesis Development.....	4
2.1 CSR Perceptions and Attributions.....	4
2.2 CSR Attributions and Trust.....	5
2.3 The Moderating Role of Car Dependency.....	7
3. Methodology.....	9
3.1 Data Collection Procedure.....	9
3.2 Sample.....	10
3.2 Measures.....	11
4. Analyses and Results.....	13
4.1 Descriptive Statistics.....	13
4.2 Hypothesis testing with Structural Equation Modeling.....	18
4.3 Hypothesis testing with Multiple Linear Regression and Analysis of Covariance ...	21
5. General Discussion.....	27
5.1 CSR Perceptions: How is the German automotive Industry Performing in Eyes of Customers?	27
5.2 CSR Attributions: Does CSR have anything to say about Consumers Trust?	28
5.3 Car Dependency: Is the Relation between CSR Attribution and Trust more than a Justification for Car Dependency?	29
5.4 Limitations and Future Research.....	30
Appendix.....	32
References.....	38

List of abbreviations

ANCOVA	Analysis of Covariances
CD	Car dependency
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
E	Egoistic
e.g.	For example
OICA	Organization of Motor Vehicle Manufacturers
SEM	Structural Equation Modeling
SHD	Stakeholder-driven
SD	Strategic-driven
T	Trust
VD	Value-driven

List of Figures

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework.....	8
Figure 2: Trust Perception.....	16
Figure 3: Path Diagram H1	19
Figure 4: Path Diagram H2	20
Figure 5: Scatter Plot H3 (ANCOVA)	23
Figure 6: Scatter Plot H4a (ANCOVA)	24
Figure 7: Scatter Plot H4b (ANCOVA)	25

List of Tables

Table 1: Sample Demographics	10
Table 2: Constructs and Items	11
Table 3: Average Variance Extracted	14
Table 4: Descriptive Statistics.....	15
Table 5: Pearsons`Correlations	17
Table 6: Model Fit H1	18
Table 7: Model Fit H2	19
Table 8: Multiple Linear Regression (Model summary).....	21
Table 9: Multiple Linear Regression (Coefficients)	22
Table 10: Car Dependency Levels in Groups	22
Table 11: H3 (ANCOVA).....	22
Table 12: H4 (ANCOVA).....	24
Table 13: H4b (ANCOVA).....	25

1. Introduction

1.1 Problem Definition and Relevance

According to the International Organization of Motor Vehicle Manufacturers (OICA), the production of cars and commercial vehicles worldwide reached a total of 77.6 million units in 2020. The automobile industry is a major player in global manufacturing, providing employment for over 50 million people and representing more than 5% of the sector's workforce globally (OICA, 2022). Particularly Germany takes the lead as the largest industry sector in terms of revenue. In 2021, businesses within this sector generated over 411 billion Euros in revenue and directly employed approximately 786.000 people (BMWK, 2021). These impressive economic figures underscore the relevance of private automobiles as the primary mode of transportation across industrialized nations (Buehler et al., 2017; Mackett, 2002; Metz, 2013). Even though the extent of car dependency varies due to public transport, infrastructure and other factors (Mouratidis et al., 2023), cars are used for nearly half of all journeys in Germany (Buehler et al., 2017).

The growing reliance on automobiles fostered by this industry has multifaceted effects, making it an ideal area for research into corporate social responsibility (CSR). First, automobile manufacturers cope with a diverse array of stakeholders, including employees, customers, and suppliers, leading to a complex interplay of interests (Masoumi et al., 2019). Second, embracing responsible practices is a critical objective for the automotive sector (Masoumi et al., 2019), which has often faced accusations of being one of the most environmentally damaging economic activities, primarily due to the greenhouse gas emissions from its products (Chandrasekaran, 2022). This has, in the past, culminated in various scandals at automobile manufacturers, resulting in significant economic consequences (Kobrosly, 2009), such as the Volkswagen fraud in 2015 (Valentini & Kruckeberg, 2018). Third, industry-specific research underscores the need for the automotive industry to demonstrate its commitment to sustainability. In 2021, a study revealed that 69% of customers consider sustainability a decisive factor when purchasing a new automobile. Furthermore, 34% of respondents indicated their willingness to switch from their preferred car brand to another if it had stronger product sustainability or the company demonstrated greater corporate sustainability efforts (Capgemini Invent, 2021). These findings underscore the financial benefits of implementing CSR, which

not only enhance the performance of automobile companies but also reduces costs and risks (Carroll & Shabana, 2010).

As consumer awareness of CSR grows, there is a simultaneous increase in the demand for responsible business practices, coupled with greater scepticism and mistrust about the companies goals behind CSR engagement (Dang et al., 2020; Lee & Cho, 2022; Li et al., 2022; Xie & Wang, 2022). Studies on CSR and consumer reactions revealed that consumers evaluate the motivation for a company's CSR engagement through CSR attributes (Janssen et al., 2015; Green & Peloza, 2014; Scholder Ellen et al., 2006; Min et al., 2023). These consumers perceptions significantly influence their reactions to the organization (Min et al., 2023) and can potentially impact their purchasing habits (Elg & Hultman, 2016; Mohr & Webb, 2005; Utgård, 2018). Additionally, perceived CSR enhances customer satisfaction among automotive buyers, potentially attracting socially conscious customers (Hillman & Keim, 2001; Loureiro et al., 2012). A favourable attitude towards a company can enhance consumer trust, as they believe that socially responsible organizations provide dependable products and are committed to consumer well-being (Castaldo et al., 2009; Mohr et al., 2001; Oeberseder et al., 2014).

In contrast to prior studies that have focused primarily on the environmental performance dimension of CSR within the automotive industry (Lin & Ho, 2016; Goswami et al., 2020), there is a notable gap in research concerning other dimensions of CSR. While research on CSR (attributions) and perceived trust exists (Ahn & Kwon, 2020; Martínez & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013; Min et al., 2023; Vlachos et al., 2009), these studies do not relate specifically to the automotive industry. In Addition, existing empirical research in this area has predominantly concentrated on the United States and the United Kingdom (Alniacik et al., 2011; Kobrosly, 2009), leaving aside other European Union nations. Furthermore, the relationship between car dependence and CSR has received limited attention in previous research. Specifically, prior literature has not examined the utilization of car dependency as a moderating variable that accounts for the dynamic between two other variables. While previous studies have explored in general moderator effects (Baron & Kenny, 1986; George et al., 1985), both, the aspect of moderating the relationship between CSR attributes and trust (Ahn & Kwon, 2020; Min et al., 2023) and the role of car dependency has remained little explored in the literature.

1.2 Research Question and Structure

This research aims to fill a significant gap in the existing literature by examining how car dependency moderates the relation between four distinct categories of CSR attributions (value-driven, stakeholder-driven, strategic, and egoistic) and consumer trust. Specifically, this study focuses on the context of the German automotive industry, seeking to answer the following question:

How can the relation between CSR perceptions and trust in the German automotive industry be moderated by car dependency?

The succeeding section will examine past research and describe the theoretical framework that serves as the foundation for this investigation and the hypotheses produced. Following that, the research strategy and methodology will be detailed, and subsequently, the study's findings along with the results of hypothesis testing will be presented. Finally, the study will conclude by discussing the practical implications of its findings, acknowledging the study's limitations, and offering suggestions for future research.

2. Theoretical Discussion and Hypothesis Development

2.1 CSR Perceptions and Attributions

The great importance of CSR is demonstrated by the significant increase in European regulations and guidelines that require economic upheaval in the form of sustainability reporting. The clear focus on sustainability, which has not only economic but also political and social implications, has led to a significant increase in the number of scientific studies on this topic (Florian Brugger, 2010). CSR is a broad and complex term that includes several overlapping fields, including e.g. “corporate citizenship, stakeholder theory, business ethics, and corporate sustainability” (Popa & Salanță, 2014). Hence, it's not unexpected that the literature contains over 37 definitions of CSR within the past 50 years (Carroll & Shabana, 2010). The CSR definition "The social responsibility of business encompasses the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time" (Carroll, 1979), has persistently served as a foundational concept in research for over 25 years. To meet the expectations mentioned in this definition, companies choose to engage in CSR activities, often driven by the influence exerted by their stakeholders, as CSR is widely regarded as a key factor for the success of corporations. (Yoon & Chung, 2018; Vlachos et al., 2009). Numerous studies have revealed that CSR has a notable impact on financial performance, including factors such as return on investment, sales growth, and market share expansion (Abu Bakar & Ameer, 2011; Margolis et al., 2003; Saeidi et al., 2015; Surroca et al., 2010; McWilliams et al., 2006).

Beyond these quantifiable metrics, CSR engagement has been observed to have an influence on how consumers perceive and respond to products or services (Brown, 1998; Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006). For instance, positive perceptions of CSR activities influence consumers' purchasing decisions (Murray & Vogel, 1997) and lead to increased customer satisfaction (Berens et al., 2005; Lichtenstein et al., 2004). Previous studies about CSR perceptions and consumer responses are different across industries, mostly focussing the banking (Fatma & Rahman, 2016) and hospitality (Fatma, 2016) industry. In addition to the industry-specific focus, geographic limitations also constrain the scope of research. For example, Loureiro's research revealed that CSR significantly contributes to consumer satisfaction within the automobile industry in Portugal. This underscores that CSR initiatives in this sector can yield dual advantages: direct benefits by reducing costs and boosting productivity, and indirect

benefits through the enhancement of consumer satisfaction (Loureiro et al., 2012). However, no research related to this subject area was found within the context of the German automotive industry.

Regarding consumer perceptions of CSR initiatives, attribution theory has frequently been applied to investigate how consumers perceive companies' motivation behind its CSR actions (Heider, 1958). According to Folkes do Consumers attribute reasons to company actions, and these attributions impact their future reactions to the corporations (Folkes, 1984). The consumers' efforts to understand the purpose behind a company's CSR activity have been found to be explained by CSR attributions (Janssen et al., 2015). Extensive research in this field has led to the categorization of CSR attributes into several distinct clusters (Green & Peloza, 2014; Scholder Ellen et al., 2006). They identified value- and stakeholder-driven motives, as well as strategic and egoistic attributions. According to their findings, the value-driven motive is influenced by views of compassion and generosity, as well as when companies engage in CSR activities solely for the sake of their moral, ethical, and social standards. The stakeholder-driven motive is influenced by stakeholder demands and a desire to meet their expectations. Egoistic reasons, on the other hand, reveal selfish objectives in which firms may abuse a cause for the purpose of profit, whereas strategic motives are anchored in companies' long-term planning and strategic aims (Ellen et al., 2000). In general, value-driven and strategic motives are viewed positively, while egoistic and stakeholder-driven motives are often seen in a negative light (Smith & Hunt, 1978). For a comprehensive exploration, intricate details can be found in the following chapter. Notably, these four types of attribution have remained a central focus in later studies, being considered as essential factors for evaluating how consumers perceive CSR initiatives. These perceptions cover various dimensions, including, among others, attitude (Dunn & Harness, 2018), loyalty (Sharma & Jain, 2019) and trust (Ahn & Kwon, 2020; Min et al., 2023)

2.2 CSR Attributions and Trust

Consumer Trust is “a confident belief that the salesperson can be relied upon to behave in such a manner that the long-term interest of the customer will be served” (Crosby et al., 1990). In later studies, it has been described as consumers' perception, that a company conducts its business with benevolence, ethics, legality, and responsibility. These studies have proven that

trust can build a long-term relationship between the customer and the company (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Pavlou & Fygenson, 2006), which in turn positively influences the repurchase intention of customers (Sartika, 2022).

Previous research found out, that CSR is intimately linked to ethical concepts like trust (Andreu et al., 2015; Miotto & Youn, 2020). Trust has been identified as direct outcome of CSR attribution, resulting in varied attitudinal and behavioural consequences (Coulter & Coulter, 2002; Orlitzky & Benjamin, 2001). As previously noted, within the framework of the four CSR attributes, diverse perceptions of CSR initiative motives can have a dual impact on customer trust, either positively or negatively. When consumers perceive a company's CSR engagement as value-oriented, they attribute it to a strong commitment to moral behaviour aligned with the company's core values (Scholder Ellen et al., 2006). This alignment can lead to a positive influence on customer trust (Su et al., 2020). Conversely, when CSR activities are perceived as simply stakeholder-driven, consumers often interpret this as a sign that the company is only motivated because they fear the rejection by stakeholders and feels indirectly forced to adopt responsible behaviour. Consequently, the stakeholder-driven CSR attribute tends to generate a negative influence on consumer trust (Scholder Ellen et al., 2006b). Similarly, CSR programs believed to be motivated by unethical or manipulative egoistic reasons will lead to distrust in the organization. Finally concerning strategic CSR attributions, Vlachos et al., 2009 has demonstrated that the strategic attribution can positively influence purchasing decisions. Thus, based on these previous findings, and considering the research gap regarding CSR attribution and trust within the German automotive industry, the current study posits the following hypotheses:

- **H1:** Higher levels of value-driven (a) and strategic (b) CSR attributions positively influence consumer trust in German automotive companies.
- **H2:** Higher levels of stakeholder-driven (a) and egoistic (b) CSR attributions negatively influence consumers trust in German automotive companies.

2.3 The Moderating Role of Car Dependency

Car dependency describes the extent to which people rely on automobiles for their daily transportation needs. Following the introduction of the concept of "car dependency" by Newman & Kenworthy in 1989, numerous studies have extensively examined the determinants and factors influencing car dependency. For instance, research has repeatedly shown that socio-demographic parameters such as age, gender, income level, education, and work position have a major effect on people's automobile usage habits (Manauagh et al., 2010; Naess, 2014). Others concluded that urban architecture and transportation infrastructure had a substantial impact on automobile use (Holtzclaw et al., 2002; Lewis, 2018). However, very few studies have been conducted to measure the level of car dependency. For example, Behren et al., 2018 proposes a thorough survey technique to assessing car dependency. Their strategy takes into account both the practical requirement for vehicles in everyday activities and subjective factors, delving into topics other than transportation.

While automobiles have become an essential part of modern life (Giannopoulos & Exadaktylos, 2017), consumers vary in their reliance on vehicles (Won, 2014). This reliance on cars can have a moderating impact on other variables and could change the relationship between them. Regarding the dynamics of moderating and mediating effects concerning CSR attributions, extensive research has been conducted in various contexts. For example, Min et al., 2023 explored the relationship between a company's attribution of CSR and its influence on consumer trust, identification, and loyalty. The study also investigated the role of perceived CSR fit in modifying these interactions. According to the findings of the study, attributions of corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities that are value-driven, strategic, and stakeholder-driven have an advantageous effect on customer trust, which in turn positively increases consumer-company identification and loyalty. In Addition, the relation between strategic attributes and perceived CSR fit is strongly moderated by perceived CSR fit. Another study explored the relationship between consumers' perceptions of a company's motives behind CSR efforts and their evaluations of CSR initiatives, emphasizing the role of consumer trust as a moderator in this evaluation process (Vlachos et al., 2009). According to the findings of the study, customers' evaluations of CSR activities are heavily impacted by their perceptions of motives. Consumer trust, acting as a mediator, plays a pivotal role in shaping both patronage decisions and the likelihood of recommending the company. However, the moderating interplay between car dependency, CSR attribution and trust remains largely unexplored in the existing literature.

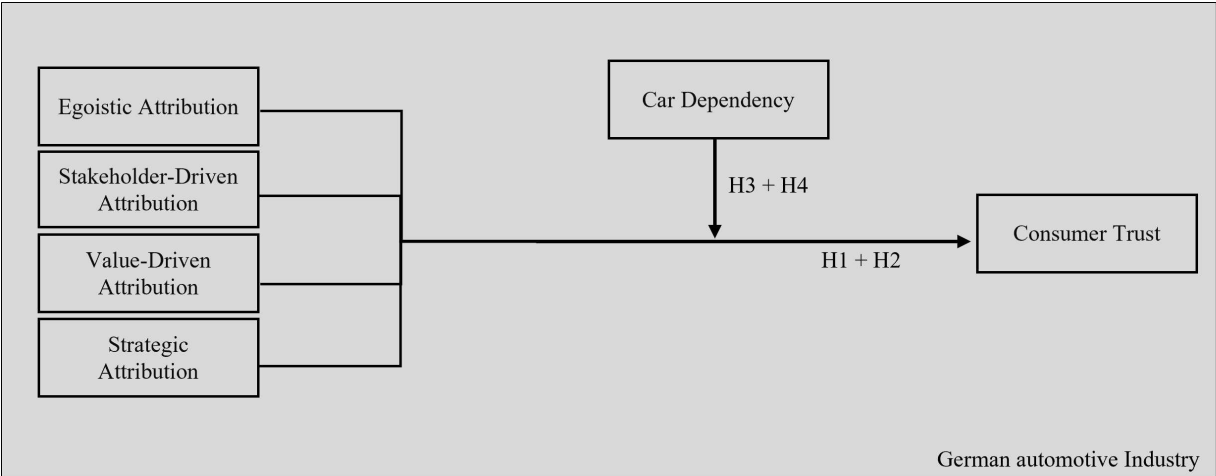
Considering these variables, it is reasonable to assume that car dependency plays a moderating role on consumers trust and CSR attribution. This function of moderation aims to explore how consumers perceptions of CSR attributions are influenced by their varying levels of car dependency. The goal is to investigate whether the dependence on cars increase or decrease the impact of CSR attributions on customer trust. It can be predicted that individuals who heavily rely on cars in their lives, will place less importance on a company’s CSR efforts when developing trust in that organization, in contrast to those who are less reliant on cars. This research examines the moderating role played by car dependency in the relationship between four categories of CSR attributions and consumer trust within the German automotive industry. It is anticipated that individuals who have a reliance on cars are less concerned about motives behind CSR engagement, such as stakeholder-driven or egoistic attributes. Therefore, it can be suggested that high levels of car dependency will weaken the effects of stakeholder-driven and egoistic-driven attributions, on consumer trust. This leads to propose the hypothesis:

- **H3:** The negative impact of stakeholder-driven (a) and egoistic (b) CSR attributions on trust will be weaker for individuals with higher car dependency.

It can be further postulate that when consumers acknowledge and appreciate the company's positive motives behind their CSR activities, they will be pushed to increase their automobile usage even more. Therefore, the following hypothesis can be proposed, and the Conceptual Framework, including all hypothesized paths, is illustrated in Fig. 1:

- **H4:** The positive impact of value-driven (a) and strategic (b) CSR attributions on trust will be significant stronger for individuals with higher car dependency.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



3. Methodology

The methodology chapter is essential is crucial for understanding the methods and procedures employed to gather and analyse data in this research study. This section describes the method used to assure the reliability and validity of the study findings. The current chapter focuses on the data collecting procedure, sample selection, and particular measurements employed to effectively analyse the hypotheses put forward.

3.1 Data Collection Procedure

The Qualtrics research platform, regarded as trustworthy across a wide range of fields (Molnar, 2019), was used to program and distribute a self-administered online survey. The survey was open for two weeks, between the 19th of October and the 2nd of November 2023.

The survey used two different sampling procedures. The primary approach employed the "Simple Random Sampling" method through platforms such as "SurveySwap," where individuals responded to surveys randomly in exchange for credits, without any specific criteria for selecting participants. The secondary strategy utilized the non-probability technique of "Convenience Sampling", distributing the survey to peers and acquaintances directly, as well as on multiple social-media platforms like Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn.

The questionnaire was designed to include two control questions. Participants were prompted to identify the automobile companies they were familiar with and to specify whether they have ever owned or currently own a car. Subsequently, they were asked to consider the automotive industry as a collective entity and give the experimental task. The task specifically focused on the rating of agreement with statements related to their perceptions of the German automobile industry and its CSR actions. To enhance participants' comprehension and alignment with CSR activities, exemplary CSR actions of German automotive firms were shown. For reference, the questionnaire is available in the appendix.

3.2 Sample

A total of 159 participants provided responses. During the data screening process, 39 surveys were excluded due to incomplete data (e.g. unanswered questions). Additionally, participants who identified themselves as non-consumers of the German automotive industry were also removed from the dataset. This yielded a total effective sample of 120 answers.

The demographic information presented in Table 2 indicates that nearly half of the participants were male, and a significant proportion fell within the age groups of 25 - 34 and 55 - 64. Moreover, most of the participants had a monthly income before taxes of over 5000€ and often graduated with a Bachelors (30%) or Master's Degree (36%).

Table 1: Sample Demographics

	Frequency	(%)
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	61	50,8
Female	59	49,2
<i>Age</i>		
< 18	1	0,8
18 – 24	9	7,5
25 – 34	32	26,7
35 – 44	6	5,0
45 – 54	3	2,5
55 – 64	27	22,5
65 or older	42	35
<i>Income before taxes</i>		
< 1000€	13	10,8
1001€ - 2000€	19	15,8
2001€ – 3000€	13	10,8
3001€ - 4000€	16	13,3
4001€ - 5000€	20	16,7
> 5000€	39	32,5
<i>Education</i>		
No Degree	0	0
High School or GED	10	8,3
Apprenticeship	11	9,1
Bachelor's Degree (BA, BS)	36	30
Master's Degree (MA, MS, MBA)	44	36,6
Doctoral Degree (PhD, EdD, MD, JD)	8	6,6
Other	11	9,1
<i>Total</i>	120	100

3.2 Measures

All questions were graded on a five-point Likert scale, from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The items from previous studies have been adapted and updated to align with the current research, specifically tailored to the automotive industry (Table 2). The scale for overall CSR perceptions was applied from the work of Turker, 2009, known for providing a reliable measure of CSR. CSR attribution of value-driven (VD), stakeholder-driven (SHD), strategic (SD) and egoistic elements (E) were drawn from Scholder Ellen et al., 2006. Trust Items (T) were collected from the research of Garbarino & Johnson, 1999. Furthermore, the items used to assess car dependence (CD) were developed from Hunecke et al., 2007, 2010, globally acknowledged set of 27 questions about attitudes, societal and personal norms to measure mobility behaviour. For estimating car dependency, only a selection of these items was necessary (Behren et al., 2018). To facilitate the evaluation of the statistics, the data set of the respective construct was labelled in CSR, VD, SD, SHD, E, T and CP. The questionnaire offered the possibility to switch from English to German to accommodate the large number of German-speaking participants.

Table 2: Constructs and Items

Constructs		Items	Sources
CSR perceptions (CSR)	CSR1	The automobile industry respects consumer rights beyond the legal requirements.	Turker, 2009
	CSR2	Customer satisfaction is highly important for the automotive industry.	
	CSR3	The automotive industry provides full and accurate information about its products to its customers.	
Value-driven attribution (VD)	VD1	The automobile industry feels morally obliged to help.	Scholder Ellen et al., 2006
	VD2	The automobile industry has a long-term interest in the community.	
	VD3	The automobile industry owners or employees believe in this cause.	
	VD4	The automobile industry wants to make it easier for consumers who care about the cause to support it.	
	VD5	The automobile industry is trying to give something back to the community.	
Strategic attribution (SD)	SD1	The automobile industry will get more customers by performing this social action.	
	SD2	The automobile industry will keep more of their customers through this social action.	

Stakeholder-driven attribution (SHD)	SHD1	The automobile industry feels their customers expect it (regarding the CSR action).	
	SHD2	The automobile industry feels their stockholders expect it.	
	SHD3	The automobile industry feels society in general (i.e., consumers) expects it.	
Egoistic attribution (E)	E1	The automobile industry is taking advantage of the small businesses to help their own business.	
	E2	The automobile industry is taking advantage of the cause to help their own business.	
	E3	The automobile industry wants to use it as a tax write-off.	
Trust (T)	T1	The automobile industry puts the customer's interests first.	Garbarino & Johnson, 1999
	T2	I can count on the automobile industry to respond to my requests.	
	T3	The automobile industry can be relied upon to keep its promises.	
Car dependency (CD)	CD1	I can structure my everyday life very well without a car.	Hunecke et al., 2007, 2010
	CD2	I can take care of what I want to with public transit.	
	CD3	It is difficult for me to travel the ways I need to go in everyday life with public transit instead of by car.	
	CD4	If I want, it is easy for me to use public transit instead of a car to do my things in everyday life.	
	CD5	Driving a car means fun and passion for me.	
	CD6	Driving a car means freedom to me.	
	CD7	When I sit in the car, I feel safe and protected.	
	CD8	Being able to use my driving skill when driving a car is fun for me.	

4. Analyses and Results

The analysis of the survey results was conducted using the statistical software tool JASP, widely recognized for its analytical capabilities in various research studies. Initially, a comprehensive descriptive statistical analysis was done to gain a deeper understanding of the sample. The descriptive analysis should help to identify patterns, trends, and abnormalities, providing a fundamental understanding of the distribution and variability within the collected data. Moreover, for Hypothesis 1 and 2 testing, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was undertaken as it is emerging as a powerful analytical technique to assess complex relationships between latent constructs and provides a robust methodology for hypothesis testing. Finally, a Multiple Linear Regression Analysis and Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted investigating Hypothesis 3 and 4, to test the complex interactions between variables among different subgroups of the study population.

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

To facilitate the assessment of descriptive statistics, the dataset was subjected to the computation of mean values for each construct. This method allowed for a comprehensive overview of the central tendencies inherent within the dataset, providing a solid foundation for the subsequent analysis of key trends and patterns.

In Table 3, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values represent the average amount of variance captured by the latent constructs, indicating the extent to which the measured variables reflect their underlying constructs. CSR (0.329), CD (0.311), SHD (0.499) and VD (0.452) demonstrate relatively lower AVE values, implying that the measured variables explain a moderate proportion of the variance in their respective constructs. SD (0.683), E (0.594), and T (0.590) exhibit higher AVE values, indicating that a significant proportion of the variance in these constructs is captured by the measured variables.

Table 3: Average Variance Extracted

Construct	AVE
CSR	0.329
VD	0.452
SD	0.683
SHD	0.499
E	0.594
T	0.590
CD	0.311

Cronbach's alpha, a widely utilized measure in the field of research, serves as a valuable indicator of the internal consistency and reliability of a set of items within a questionnaire. As shown in Table 4, the Cronbach's alpha for CSR, VD, SHD, E, T and CD were above the 0.60 cut-off value (Hair et al, 2010). This suggests a strong and consistent relationship among the items in the scale, reinforcing the reliability of the measurement instrument used in the study. In Addition, an analysis was conducted to determine that the exclusion of specific items would have had a negligible impact on the resulting Cronbach's alpha value. Due to the limited number of two items for the variable SD, a Cronbach's alpha calculation was not feasible. Therefore, the correlation coefficient (r) was employed for analysis. With $r = 0.69$ and a p-value of less than .001, the correlation surpasses the threshold of $r > .30$, indicating a strong and positive association.

The means in Table 4 provide information about the central tendency. The participants in this sample tend to score higher in SHD and E attribution. The standard deviation values provide insights into the variability of the data points around the mean for each variable. Notably, CSR and VD exhibit relatively lower standard deviations, indicating less variability within these variables. SD and E display higher standard deviations, suggesting greater variability compared to the other variables. SHD and T demonstrate standard deviations that suggest moderate variability, while CD shows the lowest standard deviation, indicating the least variability among the variables.

Many variables exhibit distributions that are nearly normal, except for variable E, which displays a slightly negatively skewed distribution. A negative skewness indicates that the majority of data points are concentrated towards the higher end of the scale, with the distribution's tail clustered at the lower end of the scale. Moreover CSR, VD, SD, T and CD

display negative kurtosis (platykurtic distribution), indicating relatively flat distributions with lighter tails compared to a normal distribution. Unlike the variables SHD and E, which exhibit positive kurtosis (leptokurtic distribution), indicating a distribution that is more peaked and has heavier tails compared to a normal distribution. The minimum and maximum values highlight the range of data points within each variable and provide context for the dispersion and limits of the data set.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics

	CSR	VD	SD	SHD	E	T	CD
Cronbach's Alpha	0.647	0.80	-	0.73	0.81	0.78	0.62
Correlation	-	-	0.69	-	-	-	-
Valid	120	120	120	120	120	120	120
Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mode ^a	3.345	2.677	3.897 ^a	3.948 ^a	4.118 ^a	2.152	3.234
Mean	3.136	2.645	3.150	3.583	3.722	2.461	3.039
Std. Deviation	0.708	0.772	1.034	0.869	0.934	0.863	0.610
Skewness	0.156	0.077	-0.561	-0.734	-1.054	0.143	-0.315
Std. Error of Skewness	0.221	0.221	0.221	0.221	0.221	0.221	0.221
Kurtosis	-0.382	-0.261	-0.329	0.755	1.114	-0.700	-0.316
Std. Error of Kurtosis	0.438	0.438	0.438	0.438	0.438	0.438	0.438
Minimum	1.667	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.500
Maximum	5.000	4.800	5.000	5.000	5.000	4.333	4.250

^a The mode with the highest density estimate is reported but multiple modes may exist.

A closer examination of the CSR items and thus the analysis of the participants' overall perception of CSR, reveals that a significant proportion of participants do not believe that the automotive industry respects consumer rights beyond the legal requirements. Furthermore, 70% of participants believe that customer satisfaction does have a crucial importance in the automotive industry. Responses to the item CSR3 are mixed, with a tendency towards the opinion that the automotive industry does not provide its customers with complete and accurate information about its products.

Figure 2: Trust Perception

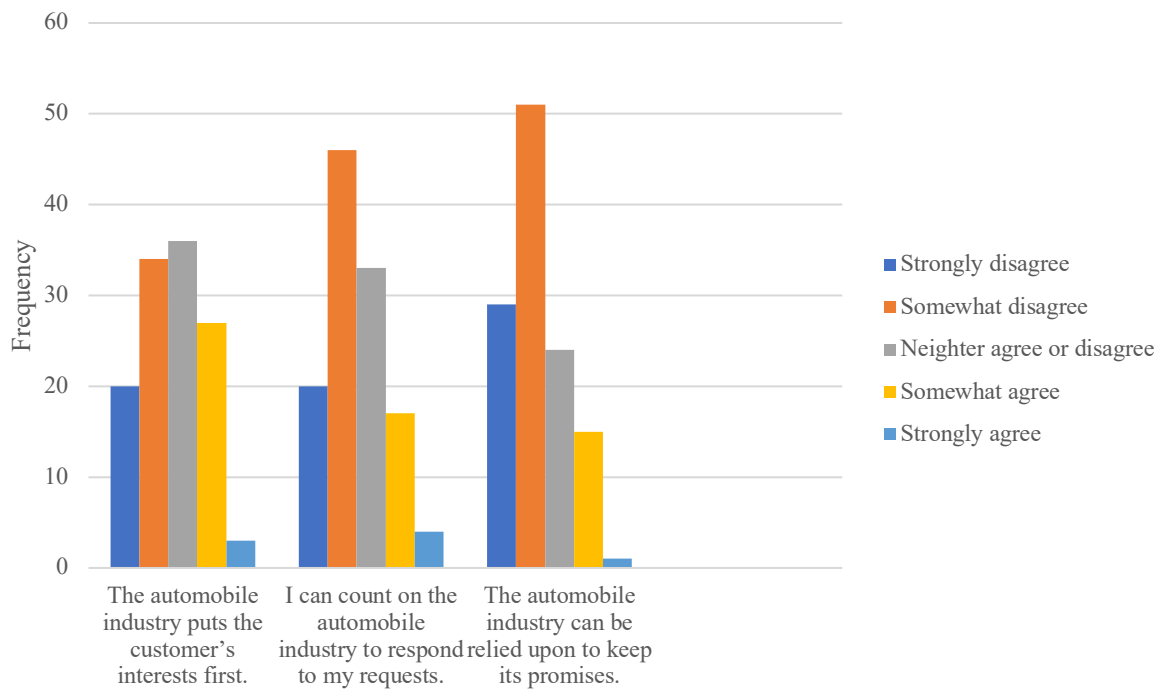


Figure 2 illustrates the trust perception of German automobile consumers. A noteworthy 54% of respondents express reservations about the automobile industry prioritizing customer interests, indicating a substantial level of doubt or mistrust in the industry's commitment to customer-centric practices. Additionally, 66% stated their doubts or disagreements concerning the industry's reliability in responding to customer requests, reflecting a widespread perception of unreliability or inefficiency in addressing consumer inquiries. This signals a prevalent perception of unreliability or inefficiency in addressing consumer inquiries or concerns. Furthermore, 80% of respondents express scepticism or disagreement regarding the industry's reliability in keeping promises, underscoring a common perception of unfulfilled commitments and a lack of trust in the industry.

The study also revealed that all participants are familiar with German automotive companies such as Mercedes-Benz, Audi, Porsche, BMW and Opel. Regarding the responses on car dependency, a substantial portion of participants utilize their cars on a daily basis (28%) or several times a week (50%). Moreover, the majority of participants depend on their cars to organize their routines and do not use public transportation as frequently. Additionally, for car consumers, owning a car is associated with enjoyment, passion, and a sense of freedom. More than 60% of participants express delight in utilizing their driving skills.

Table 5 provides Pearson correlations, revealing the relationships between various variables. The analysis highlights the lack of significant correlations for the variable CSR with other variables. Notably, a robust positive correlation is evident between VD and CSR ($r=0.544$, $p<.001$). Additionally, moderate positive correlations are observed between CD and both CSR ($r=0.218$, $p=0.017$) and VD ($r=0.221$, $p=0.015$). Strong positive correlations are found between T and both CSR ($r=0.556$, $p<.001$) and VD ($r=0.642$, $p<.001$). Furthermore, E displays a weak negative correlation with CSR ($r=-0.226$, $p=0.013$), along with minor associations with other variables. SD demonstrates moderate to strong positive correlations, particularly with VD ($r=0.472$, $p<.001$) and finally SHD shows a moderate to strong positive correlations with all other variables, particularly with SD ($r=0.413$, $p<.001$).

Table 5: Pearsons`Correlations

Variable		CSR	VD	CD	T	E	SD	SHD
1. CSR	Pearson's r	—						
	p-value	—						
2. VD	Pearson's r	0.544	—					
	p-value	< .001	—					
3. CD	Pearson's r	0.218	0.221	—				
	p-value	0.017	0.015	—				
4. T	Pearson's r	0.556	0.642	0.195	—			
	p-value	< .001	< .001	0.032	—			
5. E	Pearson's r	-0.226	-0.055	0.113	-0.180	—		
	p-value	0.013	0.553	0.219	0.049	—		
6. SD	Pearson's r	0.264	0.472	0.223	0.410	0.210	—	
	p-value	0.004	< .001	0.014	< .001	0.021	—	
7. SHD	Pearson's r	0.243	0.336	0.242	0.329	0.281	0.413	—
	p-value	0.007	< .001	0.008	< .001	0.002	< .001	—

4.2 Hypothesis testing with Structural Equation Modeling

To investigate hypothesis 1 and 2, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to dive into the dynamics of the variable connection. The focus was to analyse the impact of various CSR attributions on the trust perception of German automotive consumers, aiming for a comprehensive understanding of these interconnected elements. The primary objective was to examine how different CSR attributions influence trust perceptions of German automotive consumers, with an emphasis on obtaining an interconnected understanding of these elements.

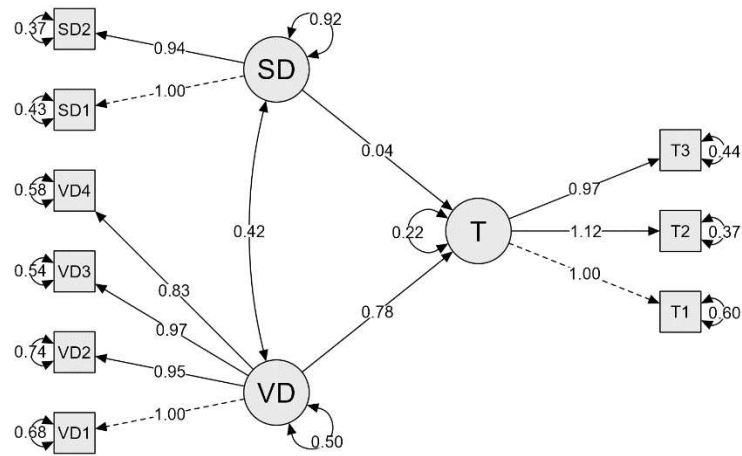
H1: Higher levels of value-driven (a) and strategic CSR attributions (b) positively influence consumer trust in German automotive companies.

Table 6: Model Fit H1

	Baseline test					Difference test			
	AIC	BIC	n	χ^2	df	p	$\Delta\chi^2$	Δdf	p
Model H1	2869.873	2953.497	120	21.469	24	0.611	21.469	24	0.611

Firstly, having a closer look on the Model of Hypothesis 1, the AIC and BIC values in Table 6 imply that Model H1 strikes a good balance between fit quality and model complexity. The Model efficiently captures and fits the observed data, as evidenced by the non-significant p-value generated from the chi-square test. Furthermore, the difference test findings show that the extra complexity provided in Model H1 compared to a baseline model does not result in a statistically significant improvement in fit. The analysis reveals a well-fitting representation of the data without adding complexity.

Figure 3: Path Diagram H1



Having a closer look on the Path Diagram of Fig. 3, the regression coefficient for VD to T is statistically significant ($p < .001$), suggesting a high positive relationship with an estimated coefficient of 0.78. This finding underscores the importance of VD attribution in influencing and contributing positively to T within the model and supports the hypothesis H1a put forward. In contrast, the association between SD and T presents a different picture. The regression coefficient stands at a modest 0.04, indicating a positive relationship; however, this is not statistically significant ($p < 0.727$). This lack of statistical significance suggests that the observed data does not support a meaningful relationship between SD and T in the model and thus, H1b can be rejected. Therefore, hypothesis 1 can only be partially validated.

H2: Higher levels of stakeholder-driven (a) and egoistic CSR attributions (b) negatively influence consumers trust in German automotive companies.

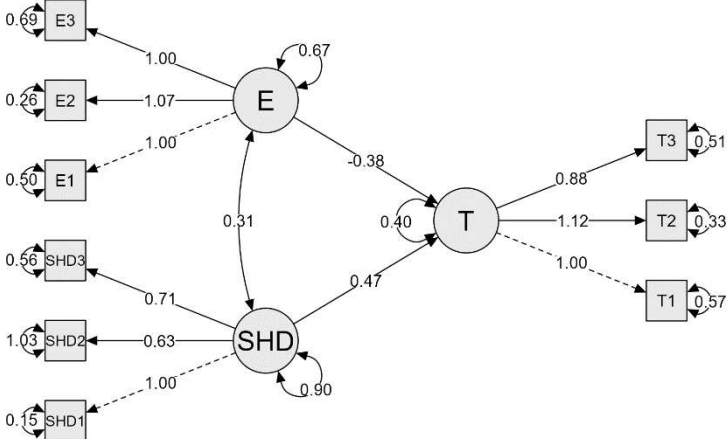
Table 7: Model Fit H2

Model fit

				Baseline test			Difference test		
	AIC	BIC	n	χ^2	df	p	$\Delta\chi^2$	Δdf	p
Model H2	2886.601	2970.225	120	36.857	24	0.045	36.857	24	0.045

Beginning with a focused examination of Hypothesis 2, the AIC and BIC values in Table 7 indicate that Model H2 strikes a balance between fit quality and model complexity. The AIC value is 2886.601, and the BIC value is 2970.225, suggesting an effective representation of the observed data. The chi-square test, with $\chi^2 = 36.857$ and $df = 24$, yields a p-value of 0.045, indicating a statistically significant deviation from expected values. Additionally, the difference test results show that the added complexity in Model H2, compared to a baseline model, does not result in a statistically significant improvement in fit. This suggests that Model H2, while capturing the data effectively, does not show a significant advantage over the baseline in terms of fit improvement. Model H2 provides a balanced fit to the data, supported by the non-significant improvement indicated by the difference test. As well as Model H1, Model H2 effectively captures the observed data without introducing excessive complexity.

Figure 4: Path Diagram H2



Additionally, the Path Diagram for H2 in Figure 4 reveals a robust and positively significant impact of SHD on T. The associated p-value, being less than 0.001, underscores the statistical significance of the relationship between these two variables. The positive relationship of 0.47 concludes into the rejection of H2a. Conversely, the regression coefficient estimates from E to T stands at -0.382, indicating a negative relationship between these variables. This negative association is statistically significant, supported by a p-value of 0.001 and thus, H2b can be confirmed. Similar to Hypothesis 1, the findings state that Hypothesis 2 can only be partially verified, as it was assumed that both, SHD and SD attributes have a negative effect on trust.

Given the unexpected results of H1b and H2a, there is a need to reformulate the upcoming Hypotheses H3 and H4, to ensure their alignment with the observed findings. Given these results, SD attribution does not exert a significant influence on trust and need to be excluded from H3. Nevertheless, SD attribution will be retained for subsequent analyses to further investigate its role and impact. Moreover, the unexpected discovery of a negative association between SHD attribution and trust needs to be adjusted in the hypotheses. Consequently, the following hypotheses are revised as follows:

- H3: The negative impact of egoistic CSR attributions on trust will be weaker for individuals with higher car dependency.
- H4: The positive impact of value-driven (a) and stakeholder-driven (b) CSR attributions on trust will be significant stronger for individuals with higher car dependency.

4.3 Hypothesis testing with Multiple Linear Regression and Analysis of Covariance

A comprehensive multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to investigate the relationship between the CSR attributes VD, SHD, SD and E, and their combined impact on the dependent variable, trust.

Table 8: Multiple Linear Regression (Model summary)

Model	R	R²	Adjusted R²	RMSE
H ₀	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.863
H ₁	0.693	0.480	0.462	0.640

As shown in Table 8, the model indicated a significant improvement, with an R² value of 0.480, implying that the additional factors explain 48% of the variance in confidence. The adjusted R² value of 0.462 takes overfitting into account, providing a more trustworthy estimate of the model's goodness of fit. Model H₁ exhibits a superior fit as indicated by its lower Root Mean Square Error (RMSE) compared to H₀.

Table 9: Multiple Linear Regression (Coefficients)

Model		Unstandardized	Standard Error	Standardized	t	p
H ₀	(Intercept)	2.461	0.079		31.226	< .001
H ₁	(Intercept)	0.796	0.342		2.328	0.021
	VD	0.631	0.082	0.564	7.705	< .001
	SHD	0.196	0.076	0.197	2.587	0.040
	SD	0.129	0.068	0.155	1.894	0.061
	E	-0.189	0.066	-0.205	-2.849	0.002

The coefficients in Table 9 offer valuable insights into the relationships between independent variables and the dependent variable. Notably, all variables emerge as significant predictors, as evidenced by p-values ranging from < .001 to 0.061. However, a closer examination reveals nuanced differences in the strength of these associations.

To investigate the proposed moderator effects outlined in Hypotheses 3 and 4, groups were established based on low and high car dependency, categorized after their respective standard deviations (σ), as illustrated in Table 10.

Table 10: Car Dependency Levels in Groups

CD levels	Frequency	Classification
High car dependent	80	$\sigma \geq 1$
Low car dependent	40	$\sigma < 1$

Following the multiple linear regression analysis, Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was with this model used to investigate how Car dependency might moderate the relationships between the specific CSR attributes and trust.

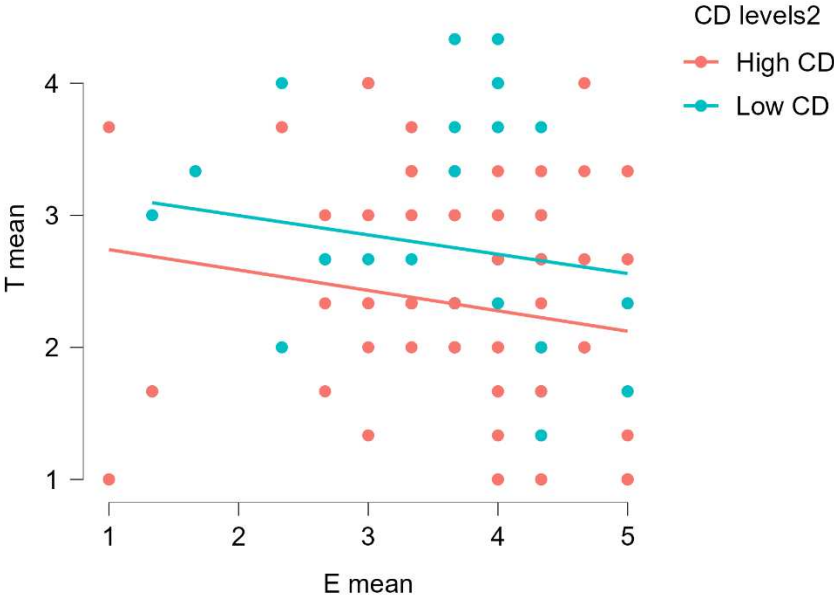
H3: The negative impact of egoistic CSR attributions on trust will be weaker for individuals with higher car dependency.

Table 11: H3 (ANCOVA)

Cases	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
CD levels	0.238	1	0.238	0.340	0.561
E	1.965	1	1.965	2.813	0.096
CD levels * E	0.001	1	0.001	0.002	0.964

In Table 11, the analysis indicates that the main effect of CD levels on trust, irrespective of Egoistic CSR attribution, is not statistically significant ($F = 0.340, p = 0.561$). This implies there's no compelling evidence to assert a meaningful difference in trust across various CD levels. Meanwhile, the main effect of egoistic CSR attribution on trust, regardless of CD levels, demonstrates a marginally significant tendency ($F = 2.813, p = 0.096$). Although the p-value is slightly above the conventional threshold, it suggests a noteworthy trend that egoistic CSR attribution might influence trust. Meanwhile, the interaction effect between CD levels and egoistic CSR attribution assesses whether the relationship between E and trust is moderated by CD levels. The very small mean square value (0.001) and the non-significant p-value (0.964) indicate that the interaction effect is not statistically significant. With Figure 5, the results indicating that the moderating influence of car dependency on the relationship between Egoistic CSR attribution and trust is not supported by the data.

Figure 5: Scatter Plot H3 (ANCOVA)



H4: The positive impact of value-driven (a) and stakeholder-driven (b) CSR attributions on trust will be significant stronger for individuals with higher car dependency.

Table 12: H4 (ANCOVA)

Cases	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
CD levels	0.252	1	0.252	0.577	0.449
VD	31.882	1	31.882	73.035	< .001
CD levels * VD	0.630	1	0.630	1.444	0.232

As shown the results of H4a in Table 12, the main effect of CD levels was not statistically significant ($F = 0.577, p = 0.449$), suggesting that overall, trust variation across different car dependency levels is not significant. However, the main effect of VD attributions on trust was highly significant ($F = 73.035, p < .001$), indicating that individuals with higher VD attributions exhibit significantly greater trust, regardless of CD levels. The interaction effect between CD levels and VD attributions did not show statistical significance ($F = 1.444, p = 0.232$), suggesting that the positive impact of VD attributions on trust does not significantly differ across various levels of car dependency. It appears that the non-moderating effect observed in Hypothesis H4a is also evident in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Scatter Plot H4a (ANCOVA)

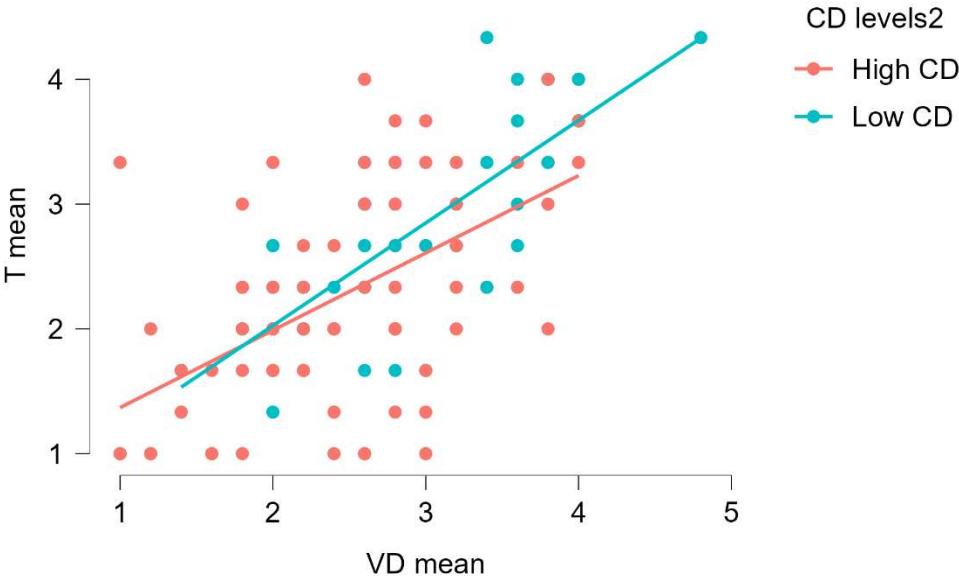
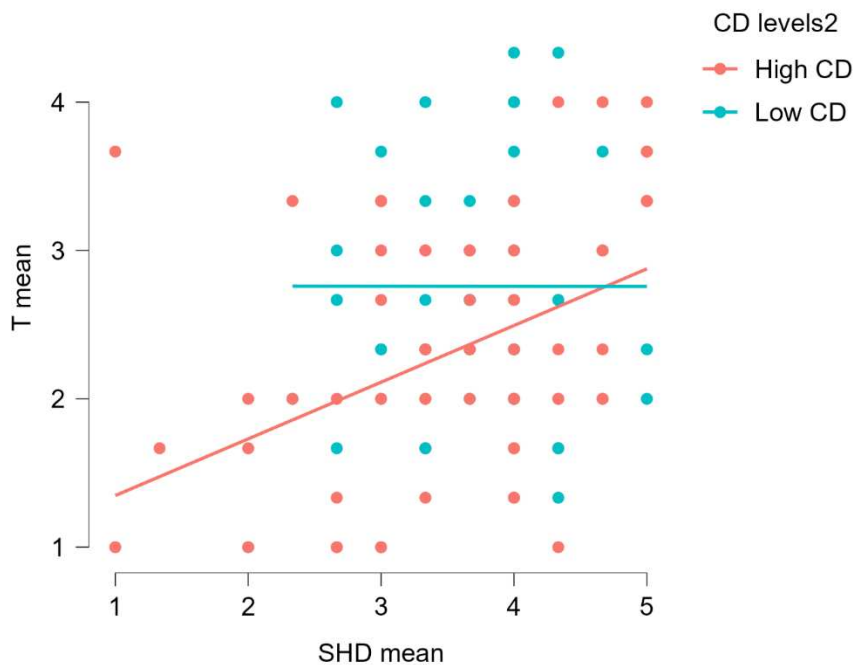


Table 13: H4b (ANCOVA)

Cases	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
CD levels	3.244	1	3.244	5.158	0.025
SHD	2.046	1	2.046	3.253	0.074
CD levels * SHD	2.060	1	2.060	3.275	0.073

Having a closer look on H4b in Table 13, the main effect of CD levels exhibits statistical significance ($F = 5.158, p = 0.025$), signifying a substantial overall impact on trust in the context of SHD attributions. This highlights a significant variation in trust across different levels of car dependency. The main effect of SHD attribution is marginally significant ($F = 3.253, p = 0.074$), suggesting that higher SHD is associated with higher levels of T (and vice-versa). Moreover, the interaction effect between CD levels and SHD attribution is marginally significant ($F = 3.275, p = 0.073$), implying that the positive impact of SHD attributions on trust vary based on different levels of car dependency and SHD attribution.

Figure 7: Scatter Plot H4b (ANCOVA)



In line with the previous numerical results mentioned, Figure 7 illustrates a robust moderating effect of car dependency between SHD attribution and trust. Notably, low CD levels exhibit no noticeable effect, while high CD levels demonstrate a significant impact. The evidence observed for H4b underscores that the positive impact of SHD attributions on trust is notably stronger for individuals with higher car dependency.

5. General Discussion

Aligned with the increasing importance of CSR practices, the present study investigates consumers' perceptions of CSR initiatives within the German automotive industry. Specifically, it explores the impact of distinct CSR attributions - namely value-driven, stakeholder-driven, egoistic, and strategic - on customer trust. Further, the moderating role of car dependency has been examined to identify how it influences the created links between CSR attributions and trust. This study reveals crucial insights that enhance our understanding of how consumers' evaluations of the motivations behind companies' CSR initiatives guide the establishment of trust in these organizations and how it can be influenced by car dependency.

5.1 CSR Perceptions: How is the German automotive Industry Performing in Eyes of Customers?

The study results emphasize a common attitude of scepticism and disagreement among German automobile consumers regarding the overall trustworthiness of the automotive industry. This perspective is further supported by the analysis of the overall CSR perception, highlighting a distinct scepticism among participants regarding the automotive industries' commitment to consumer rights beyond its legal obligations. While there is notable acknowledgment of the critical importance of customer satisfaction in the automotive sector, the findings indicate insufficient levels of customer satisfaction within this industry. The obtained results could be attributed to various factors, with a primary consideration being the recurrent scandals in the automotive industry, notably exemplified by the emissions manipulation scandals at Volkswagen and other German automotive companies. These repeated incidents might have contributed to a widespread sense of mistrust in the entire automobile industry. Additionally, concerns about the environmental impact of the automotive sector play a significant role. The association of the industry with high Co2 emissions, contributing to climate change, has led environmentally conscious consumers to question the sustainability efforts of automakers. The increased awareness of pollution created by combustion vehicles, causing customers to reconsider their faith, and prompting consumers to reevaluate their trust in the industry.

These findings, which demonstrate a substantial lack of trust in the German automobile sector, might provide essential insights to automakers. To remedy this, a determined effort to

reestablish trust by addressing the root reasons of scepticism is required. This includes increasing transparency, adopting ethical standards, and displaying a genuine commitment to CSR. Moreover, acknowledging and actively addressing environmental concerns, such as reducing Co2 emissions and adopting sustainable practices, can positively influence consumer trust.

5.2 CSR Attributions: Does CSR have anything to say about Consumers Trust?

In keeping with current research on CSR attribution, the findings demonstrate that CSR attributions play an important role in understanding consumer reactions to CSR. As anticipated, the findings indicate that consumers gain trust in firms when they perceive their CSR initiatives to be value-driven. Egoistic attribution reduces trust in organizations since their CSR initiatives are viewed to abuse a cause for the sake of profit.

Contrary to the expectations, the current study's findings show that stakeholder-driven CSR attribution is positively connected to trust, implying that consumers view stakeholders' engagement in CSR actions as appropriate for promoting social reasons. Possible reasons for this positive association could include a perception that such engagement demonstrates a comprehensive commitment to social well-being or that it accords with modern standards for ethical business activity.

In addition, it was also unexpected that strategic-driven CSR attribution had no impact on consumer trust. Upon reflection, it can be posited that there might even be a negative association between strategically driven attributions and trust. This expectation arose from the realization that strategically motivated attributions frequently express an instrumental perspective of CSR.

The results demonstrate that CSR initiatives should be oriented in a value-driven and stakeholder-focused manner. This means to clearly communicate the company's core values and commitment to societal impact. This should be prominently featured in marketing materials, company statements, and CSR reports. To actively engage stakeholders in CSR actions for social causes, automakers can involve stakeholders in the decision-making process for CSR initiatives and establish open and transparent communication channels with

stakeholders. Stakeholders should be regularly updated on ongoing CSR projects and their contributions should be recognized and appreciated.

5.3 Car Dependency: Is the Relation between CSR Attribution and Trust more than a Justification for Car Dependency?

The moderator analysis examining the influence of car dependency on the relationship between CSR attribution and trust revealed a noteworthy moderating effect, solely for stakeholder-driven CSR attribution on trust. However, no moderating effects were observed for value-driven and egoistic CSR attributions.

On one hand, consumers, regardless of their reliance on cars, may share a common understanding that value-driven CSR actions are undertaken with the primary goal of making a positive social impact rather than being influenced by car dependency. The absence of a moderating effect indicates that the positive impact of value-driven CSR attributions on trust is sustained across various levels of car dependency, emphasizing the universal perception of such initiatives as authentic and socially responsible, irrespective of individuals' reliance on automobiles.

On the other hand, the non-moderating effect of egoistic CSR attribution may be attributed to the consistent perception among consumers, irrespective of their level of car dependency. It appears that consumers perceive egoistic CSR attribution similarly, experiencing a negative impact on trust regardless of their reliance on cars. This uniform negative impact could be rooted in a universal scepticism or distrust triggered by the perceived self-serving motives behind egoistic CSR actions. Regardless of their car dependency, consumers might share a common belief that egoistic CSR initiatives are primarily driven by profit motives rather than a genuine commitment to societal or environmental well-being. This shared perception may contribute to the observed lack of moderation in the relationship between egoistic CSR attributions and trust across different car dependency levels.

The robust positive moderating effect of stakeholder-driven CSR attribution on trust indicates that consumers' perceptions of CSR initiatives influenced by stakeholder engagement is significantly stronger for high car dependent consumers. Possible explanation for this could be,

that individuals who heavily reliant on cars, see themselves as stakeholders in the automotive industry, they might particularly appreciate CSR initiatives that involve engagement with themselves. This engagement could be perceived as the company recognizing and addressing the needs and concerns of individuals who rely on their products, thereby fostering a stronger sense of trust.

The findings of the moderator analysis yield significant practical implications for automotive companies. In addition to customizing CSR initiatives to address the wider concerns of their consumer base, companies can adopt targeted strategies for customers displaying strong loyalty. This entails acknowledging these loyal customers as valued stakeholders and affording them exclusive opportunities to actively participate in CSR efforts. One effective strategy could involve allowing loyal customers, particularly those with high annual mileage, to engage in special CSR programs or events. This may encompass the participation in focus groups, or collaborative initiatives where loyal customers can contribute their valuable insights and feedback.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research

Despite providing valuable insights into the CSR attribution process and its impact on customer responses, this study has notable limitations.

First, it is important to consider a potential limitation related to causality in the current study. While the research assumes that car dependency influences the relationship between CSR attributions and trust, it is conceivable that the influence might be reciprocal. Specifically, trust also could potentially influence car dependency (e.g., individuals with higher trust may be more inclined to develop favourable CSR attributions as a result of their car dependency). To mitigate this potential bidirectional influence, future research could explore experimental manipulations. For example, researchers might use various probes or reflection activities to influence people's attitudes about car dependence. This experimental strategy would allow for a study of how experimentally caused changes in car dependency could influence the link between CSR attributions and trust. This focused investigation might yield useful insights into the causal dynamics between these variables, specifically in the context of car dependency.

Second, the skewness in the age distribution of respondents, with a considerable concentration in the age categories of 25-34 and 55 or older, is one notable restriction. This skewness may restrict the findings' generalizability over a larger demographic range. It is critical to understand that consumer views and responses to CSR programs fluctuate across age groups, and that the overrepresentation of specific age groups may not portray the whole diversity of opinions within the target audience. It's also worth noting that a sizable number of respondents in this sample have a high level of academic knowledge, with 36% possessing a master's degree. Because academics' opinions and attitudes may differ from those with minor educational backgrounds, the presence of highly educated persons among respondents adds a possible bias in the study results. Individuals with higher degrees generally have a stronger tendency to question and critically assess information, which may contribute to the observed high level of scepticism and mistrust.

Third, it's important to acknowledge that the study had a sample size of 120 participants, with 66% categorized as highly car dependent. The limited size of the sample and the huge amount of high car dependent participants may affect the generalizability of the findings and could potentially introduce sampling bias. To enhance the robustness and external validity of future studies, it is recommended to include a more diverse and larger sample that encompasses a broader range of car dependence, academic backgrounds and demographic characteristics.

Future research might look into a comparative comparison of CSR attitudes and trust in the automobile sector across nations or regions. This might reveal information on cultural differences and their influence on consumer views. In addition, long-term research can be conducted to assess changes in customer views and trust. This would aid in comprehending the long-term consequences of CSR actions as well as how they change.

Appendix

Questionnaire

1) Introduction

Dear Participant,

I appreciate your participation in this research study, which aims to explore the relationship between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) perceptions, car dependency and consumer trust within the context of the German automotive industry.

Please note the following instructions:

- The data collected from this survey will be anonymized and used solely for research purposes. Your responses will be treated with strict confidentiality and will not be shared or used for any other intent beyond the scope of this study.
- The estimated duration is 7-10 minutes.

Feel free to contact me, if you have questions or comments: s-nhellmich@ucp.pt

Your valuable input will contribute significantly to my understanding of consumer behaviors and perceptions within the automotive sector. Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey.

Let's begin.

2) Control Questions

2.1 Which German automobile companies are you familiar with?

- Image: Mercedes-Benz logo
- Image: Porsche logo
- Image: Volkswagen logo
- Image: BMW logo
- Image: Opel logo
- Image: Audi logo
- Others

2.2 Have you ever owned or currently own a car produced by a German automobile company?

Note: This survey is not relevant to you if you selected "No" and you can exit at this point.

- Yes
- No

3) Explanation

CSR stands for "Corporate Social Responsibility" and refers to activities and initiatives taken by companies to fulfill their social and environmental responsibilities.

Consider following examples of responsible and sustainable initiatives (Corporate Social Responsibility Engagement) undertaken by the German automotive industry:

- Volkswagen is heavily investing in the development of electric vehicles to promote cleaner and more sustainable transportation.
- Mercedes-Benz is actively involved in road safety programs. They promote road safety education and support initiatives to reduce accidents.
- BMW collaborates with educational institutions and nonprofits to provide education training for disadvantaged youth.
- Audi maintains a high level of transparency in its operations, ensuring that its governance practices adhere to the highest standards of accountability.









- Porsche encourages its employees to engage in corporate volunteering activities. They support initiatives that focus on education, social welfare, and community development.
- Opel implemented eco-friendly manufacturing processes to reduce its environmental impact.

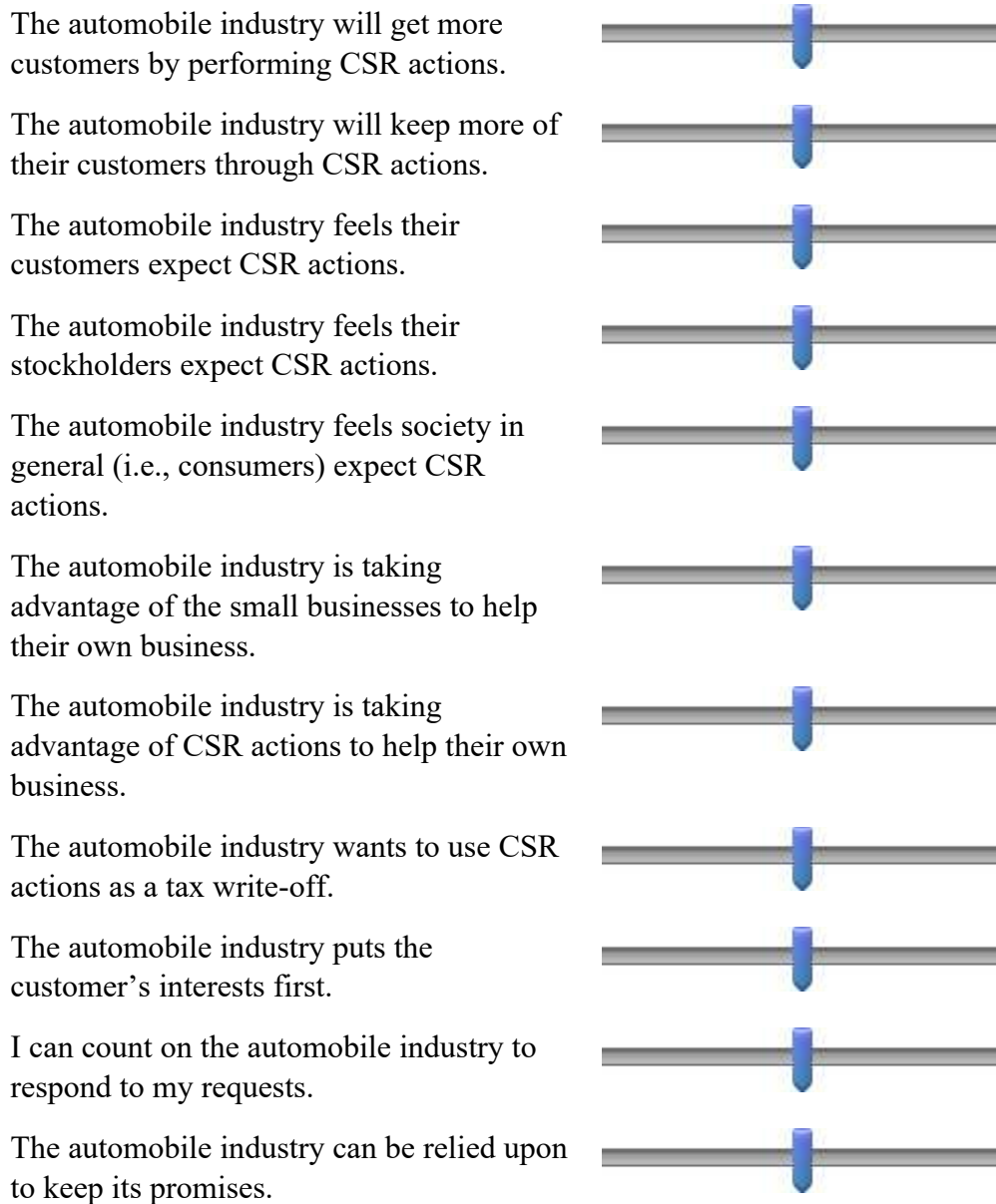
4) Experimental Task

4.1 Now, let's consider the entire German automobile industry as a collective entity.

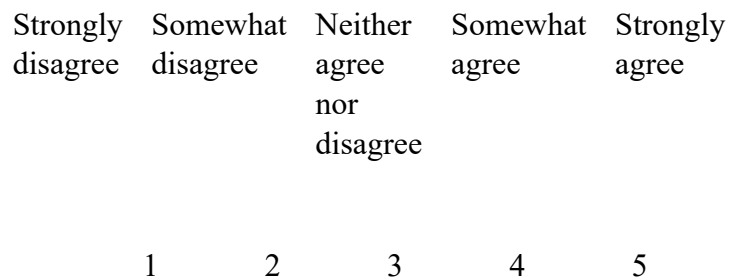
How much would you rate the CSR actions of the automobile industry in general?

Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
	1	2	3	4	5
The automobile industry respects consumer rights beyond the legal requirements.					
Customer satisfaction is highly important for the automotive industry.					
The automotive industry provides full and accurate information about its products to its customers.					
The automobile industry feels morally obliged to help.					
The automobile industry has a long-term interest in the community.					
The automobile industry owners or employees believe in their CSR actions.					
The automobile industry wants to make it easier for consumers who care about the CSR action to support it.					
The automobile industry is trying to give something back to the community.					



4.2 Please reflect the role of a cars in your everyday life and rate your level of agreement with the following statements:



I can structure my everyday life very well without a car.



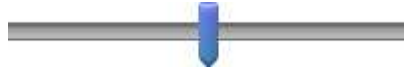
I can take care of what I want to with public transit.



It is difficult for me to travel the ways I need to go in everyday life with public transit instead of by car.



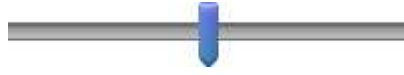
If I want, it is easy for me to use public transit instead of a car to do my things in everyday life.



Driving a car means fun and passion for me.



Driving a car means freedom to me.



When I sit in the car I feel safe and protected.



Being able to use my driving skill when driving a car is fun for me.



5) Soziodemographic Information

Almost done. Please provide soziodemographic Information.

Age in years

▼ Younger than 18 (1) ... 65 or older (7)

Gender

▼ Male (1) ... Non-binary / third gender (3)

Monthly income before taxes (gross)

▼ Less than 1000€ (1) ... More than 5001€ (6)

Highest educational level

- No Degree
- High School Diploma or GED
- Apprenticeship
- Bachelor's Degree (e.g., BA, BS)
- Master's Degree (e.g., MA, MS, MBA)
- Doctoral Degree (e.g., PhD, EdD, MD, JD)
- Other

Car usage frequency

▼ Daily (1) ... Never (6)

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