

The Mediating Role of Corporate Social Responsibility and Employee Proactivity in the Relationship Between Organizational Punishment and Corporate Performance: A Case Study of Alibaba

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Abstract. This study investigates the complex relationships among organizational punishment, employee proactivity, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and corporate performance in Chinese internet enterprises, focusing on Alibaba as a case study. Using a moderated mediation model, the research empirically analyzes how organizational punishment indirectly influences corporate performance through CSR and employee proactivity. The findings reveal that while organizational punishment alone does not directly affect corporate performance, it significantly improves outcomes when mediated by CSR and employee proactivity. To explore these relationships, this study employs Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), a widely used technique in management research to analyze complex interactions between variables. SEM is particularly suitable for testing direct and indirect effects, providing a robust framework for examining latent constructs and their interrelations (Hair et al., 2019). The study provides valuable insights into designing balanced management strategies that accommodate both control and motivational approaches, thereby fostering a sustainable competitive advantage for firms in the Internet sector. The research highlights the importance of considering CSR and employee proactivity when implementing organizational punishment measures to optimize employee behavior and organizational outcomes.

Keywords: Organizational Punishment, Corporate Social Responsibility, Employee Proactivity, Corporate Performance, Internet Enterprises

1. Introduction

In recent years, with the rapid development of the global digital economy, internet enterprises have occupied an increasingly important economic position worldwide. Giants like Alibaba have not only achieved remarkable success in e-commerce and cloud computing but have also led the transformation of business models through globalization and technological innovation (Wang et al., 2021). However, the management challenges faced by such enterprises are also becoming increasingly complex. Internet companies typically operate in fast-changing, high-pressure environments where efficient management systems are essential to meet ever-changing market demands and technological advancements.

In recent years, researchers have extensively discussed the management models of Internet companies, especially the balance between innovation-driven practices and management standardization. As a standard management tool, Organizational Punishment is widely used by many Internet companies to maintain order and improve efficiency (Rumengan et al., 2021). In this context, how internet companies can enhance performance, stimulate employee proactivity, and maintain long-term competitiveness through reasonable Organizational Punishment measures has become an essential topic for academia and enterprise managers.

Scholars have recently delved deeper into the study of Organizational Punishment, emphasizing its dual role as a management tool. Punishment can correct employee behavior and improve organizational efficiency in the short term. However, excessive or frequent punishment may lead to employee dissatisfaction, increased stress, and decreased proactivity, negatively impacting long-term corporate performance (Kentjana et al., 2018).

According to Widiarto et al. (2019), Organizational Punishment is particularly prone to trigger employee resistance in high-pressure work environments, leading to decreased job satisfaction and motivation. This effect is particularly evident in innovation-driven internet companies, where employee proactivity and innovation are core elements of success. Excessive punishment may stifle creativity and result in talent loss, thus weakening the company's competitiveness.

For internet enterprises like Alibaba, employee proactivity has always been a critical factor in their rapid growth. Hence, exploring how to balance punitive measures and employee proactivity is essential.

Employee proactivity has recently garnered significant attention, especially in knowledge-intensive and innovation-oriented companies. Research indicates that proactive employees are more effective at identifying opportunities, solving problems, and driving organizational change (Lebel et al., 2022). Such behavior improves individual work performance and brings innovation to the company, enhancing overall organizational competitiveness (Kosasih K. et al., 2020).

Employee proactivity is considered one of the core drivers of long-term success for enterprises (Shahid, A. 2019). In companies like Alibaba, employee proactivity is a crucial element of success. However, Organizational Punishment can inhibit employees' proactivity, stifling their creativity and work engagement, which may negatively impact corporate performance. Therefore, designing a reasonable punishment mechanism to ensure that employees comply with rules while maintaining high levels of proactivity and creativity has become an important management issue (Khalili, A. 2018). Finding a balance between punishment and encouragement, ensuring employees adhere to organizational rules and retain high proactivity, is a crucial management challenge for Internet enterprises.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has recently received widespread attention in management research. CSR represents a company's contribution to society and the environment and is also considered an integral part of corporate culture, profoundly influencing employees' behavior and attitudes (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019). According to Aguinis and Glavas (2012), CSR enhances corporate reputation and improves internal employee outcomes such as identification, satisfaction, and proactivity. Their review highlights the role of CSR as a strategic tool to mitigate the negative impacts of managerial practices, aligning closely with this study's focus on CSR's moderating role between organizational punishment and employee proactivity. Research shows that CSR can enhance employees'

organizational identification, job satisfaction, and sense of responsibility, thereby indirectly promoting improvements in corporate performance (Chaudhary, 2020).

For internet companies like Alibaba, CSR is not only an essential component of their external image but also a part of their internal culture and management mechanisms. Numerous studies have shown that when companies fulfill their social responsibilities, they create a more inclusive and caring cultural atmosphere internally, which can mitigate some potential organizational management issues. When employees perceive their company as fulfilling its social responsibilities, they are likelier to exhibit high levels of proactivity and loyalty (Pan, Y. 2018). CSR helps alleviate the negative emotions triggered by punishment and assists in regulating employees' work attitudes, allowing them to respond more positively to the pressure brought about by punishment. By implementing CSR practices, organizations can create a more supportive work environment, encouraging employees to respond positively to punishment measures. This ultimately enhances employees' overall well-being and job satisfaction. Significantly, when companies emphasize discipline and performance, focusing on social responsibility may reduce the negative impact of Organizational Punishment, helping enterprises strike a balance between strict management and innovation. Therefore, CSR can be a moderating variable that influences the relationship between Organizational Punishment and employee proactivity, impacting overall corporate performance.

Internet enterprises' rapid development, unique organizational structures, and cultures have introduced new management challenges. Against this background, effectively inspiring employee proactivity and improving corporate performance through management tools like Organizational Punishment has become an essential topic for enterprise managers and academic researchers. Most existing research has separately examined the mechanisms of Organizational Punishment, employee proactivity, corporate performance, and CSR. However, the complex relationships among these variables, particularly within internet companies, have yet to be sufficiently empirically studied. Specifically, research on its management mechanisms for global enterprises like Alibaba provides valuable theoretical and practical insights for other Internet companies. Additionally, while some research has explored CSR's moderating role between Organizational Punishment and employee behavior in traditional industries, there remains a research gap in fast-evolving internet companies. This study constructs a moderated mediation model to explore how Organizational Punishment affects corporate performance through employee proactivity as a mediating variable and the moderating role of corporate social responsibility in this process. Through empirical analysis, this paper aims to provide theoretical support and management recommendations on designing efficient management mechanisms for Internet enterprises and enrich theoretical knowledge in the management field regarding CSR and employee behavior management.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis

2.1. Organizational Punishment and Corporate Performance

Organizational punishment refers to measures managers take to correct employees' improper or non-compliant behaviors, such as disciplinary actions, warnings, and fines. Recent studies emphasize the importance of methodological rigor when investigating such relationships. Hair et al. (2019) highlight that using SEM allows researchers to simultaneously assess organizational punishment's direct and indirect impacts on corporate performance through mediators like employee proactivity and CSR. Additionally, SEM provides a robust mechanism for validating theoretical frameworks through model fit indices. This management approach maintains organizational order and prevents employees from deviating from company goals. The academic community has recently extensively studied the impact of Organizational Punishment on corporate performance. Exploring the relationship between Organizational Punishment and corporate performance and examining how disciplinary actions, warnings, fines, and other corrective measures influence employee behavior and, ultimately,

organizational performance has become a key focus. Research suggests that moderate Organizational Punishment can have positive effects, particularly in the short term, by deterring non-compliant employee behavior and improving work efficiency (Yan, H., 2021). According to Behavioral Regulation Theory in management, Organizational Punishment as an external control method can help ensure that employees comply with company policies and behavioral norms, thereby reducing operational risks caused by misconduct. When a company punishes employees for improper behaviors, it can increase employees' sense of responsibility and lawfulness, strengthening their alignment with corporate social responsibility. For example, in the manufacturing industry, Organizational Punishment can reduce operational errors and safety incidents, improving production efficiency and product quality (Leong et al., 2020). Research by Badrudin et al. (2020) indicates that the punishment variable positively and significantly affects employee performance.

However, scholars have gradually recognized that excessive punishment may produce adverse effects. The negative impact of Organizational Punishment has become a topic of concern in recent literature. According to Stress Theory, frequent punishment can increase employees' psychological stress, reducing job satisfaction and organizational commitment, thereby impacting corporate culture and social responsibility (US et al., 2016; Mlekus & Maier, 2021; Lin et al., 2020). Companies that rely excessively on punishment often face a long-term decline in employee proactivity, deteriorating teamwork, and talent loss. Research finds that organizational efficiency may decrease when employees fear punishment for proactive actions. This fear can also harm employees, leading to unhappiness and various forms of dissatisfaction, including a decline in health (Jung, J., 2020). These issues can weaken a company's innovation capability and negatively affect organizational performance, especially in knowledge-intensive industries. Misusing punishment policies can severely damage employees' creativity and motivation, leading to turnover, especially among skilled and high-quality employees, thus hindering corporate innovation and competitiveness (Van der Stede et al., 2020). For external stakeholders, internal punishment mechanisms can impact the company's social responsibility image. Companies emphasizing social responsibility may prefer educational and guiding approaches rather than punishment alone (Vogel, 2007).

The effects of Organizational Punishment also vary across different cultural backgrounds. Research shows that in high-power-distance cultures (e.g., East Asia), employees tend to accept punishment as a symbol of authority, making punishment more effective as a deterrent in these cultural contexts. In low-power-distance cultures (e.g., Western countries), employees place greater importance on fairness and dignity, and excessive punishment may incite employee resistance and even lead to labor disputes and lawsuits (Hofstede, 2011). Therefore, companies must fully consider cultural factors when designing and implementing punishment measures to avoid long-term adverse effects on employees' psychology and work behaviors.

Further studies reveal that the effectiveness of punishment is closely related to its timing and approach. Timeliness is critical; punishment should be promptly applied after improper behavior to have a deterrent effect. If punitive measures are delayed, employees may not associate it with their misconduct, weakening its effectiveness (Gneezy et al., 2011). Additionally, the manner of punishment affects employee response. For instance, public punishment may have a more substantial deterrent effect but is also more likely to cause psychological harm to employees and damage team morale. Therefore, individualized, private punishments are often considered more effective and humane (Mascarenhas, D., 2018).

Based on the above literature and theoretical analysis, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Organizational Punishment significantly positively affects corporate performance (Podsakoff et al., 2006).

H2: Organizational Punishment has a significant positive effect on corporate social responsibility.

H5: Organizational Punishment has a significant positive effect on employee proactivity.

2.2. The Impact of Employee Proactivity on Corporate Performance

Employee proactivity refers to actions taken by employees to actively address potential future changes, identify problems, and propose solutions beyond their job requirements (Crant, J.M. 2000). Parker, Bindl, and Strauss (2010) describe employee proactivity as a forward-looking behavior motivated by autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Their proactive motivation model emphasizes how such behaviors not only enhance individual performance but also drive organizational innovation and adaptability, reinforcing the theoretical foundation of this study. Numerous studies have demonstrated a significant positive correlation between employee proactivity and corporate performance (Crant, J.M. 2000). Recent research shows that proactivity is a critical factor in corporate success, especially in the internet industry. Employee proactivity is particularly important in Internet companies. Proactive employees can identify issues, actively seek solutions, and drive corporate performance improvement through innovation. The rapid growth of Internet enterprises depends on proactive employees, especially when facing uncertain market environments, where proactive employees can help companies seize opportunities and enhance market competitiveness (Li et al., 2019). Proactive employees drive organizational innovation and enhance corporate performance (Li et al., 2019). Organizational Punishment affects corporate performance by influencing employee proactivity. An overly strict punishment mechanism can inhibit employees' innovation and proactive behavior, often core factors for maintaining corporate competitiveness (Janssen, 2000).

Some studies also indicate that punishment mechanisms can lower corporate performance by diminishing employees' motivation and innovation willingness (Manzoor et al., 2021). In contrast, when employees maintain a high level of proactivity, companies can sustain high performance levels even in punitive environments (Yu et al., 2023).

Additionally, research suggests that employee proactivity affects internal organizational efficiency and directly impacts external market performance. For internet giants like Alibaba, employees' autonomous innovation behaviors are core competitive advantages that help maintain industry leadership (Schmuck & Benke, 2020).

Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4: Employee proactivity mediates the relationship between Organizational Punishment and corporate performance (Strauss et al., 2018).

H7: Employee proactivity significantly positively affects corporate performance (Li et al., 2019).

2.3. Relationship Between Corporate Social Responsibility, Employee Proactivity, and Corporate Performance

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a company's commitment to society and the environment and a management strategy that can enhance employees' job satisfaction and organizational identification (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019). There has been growing research on CSR's impact on employee behavior in recent years. In internet companies, CSR enhances a company's external image and indirectly influences corporate performance by boosting employee loyalty and proactivity (Chaudhary, 2020).

Studies indicate that employees who perceive their company as fulfilling its social responsibilities develop a stronger sense of belonging and trust in the organization (Rupp & Mallory, 2015). This can help mitigate the negative emotions that Organizational Punishment might cause, enhancing employee proactivity. In companies like Alibaba, CSR can act as a moderating variable that reduces the negative impact of Organizational Punishment on employee proactivity, ultimately improving corporate performance.

CSR is not merely a tool for enhancing corporate reputation; it also indirectly promotes corporate performance by increasing employee identification and job satisfaction (Chaudhary, 2020). Increasingly, research has shown that CSR can boost a company's innovation capabilities and market performance by enhancing employee proactivity (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019; Lin et al., 2020).

In the internet industry, CSR indirectly improves corporate performance by influencing employees' work motivation and proactivity. For enterprises like Alibaba, CSR is becoming increasingly important

in development strategy. It enhances brand image and gives employees a greater sense of social value and identification, thus promoting corporate performance (Zhao & Dou, 2019).

Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3: Corporate Social Responsibility significantly positively affects corporate performance.

H6: Corporate Social Responsibility significantly positively affects employee proactivity.

H8: Corporate Social Responsibility mediates the relationship between Organizational Punishment and corporate performance; when CSR levels are high, the negative impact of Organizational Punishment on corporate performance is reduced (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012).

H9: Corporate Social Responsibility and employee proactivity jointly mediate the relationship between Organizational Punishment and corporate performance; when CSR levels are high, employee proactivity and the positive impact on corporate performance increase (Kim et al., 2017).

2.4. Construction Framework of Research Model

This study explores the relationship between Organizational Punishment and corporate performance, focusing on the mediating and moderating roles of employee proactivity and corporate social responsibility (CSR). Based on existing literature and the hypotheses mentioned above, the research model is shown in Figure 1. These hypotheses are based on theoretical and empirical support from previous studies. Podsakoff et al. (2006) suggest that Organizational Punishment as a control mechanism, while reducing misconduct, may inhibit employees' innovative behaviors, impacting corporate performance. Strauss et al. (2018) highlight employee proactivity as a critical factor influencing performance, while Aguinis and Glavas (2012) emphasize CSR's moderating role in corporate management, effectively reducing the negative impact of organizational behavior on employees. Kim et al. (2017) further indicate that CSR enhances corporate performance by improving employee job satisfaction and organizational commitment. This study will empirically analyze data from Alibaba to verify these hypotheses and explore the complex relationships between Organizational Punishment, employee proactivity, corporate social responsibility, and corporate performance.

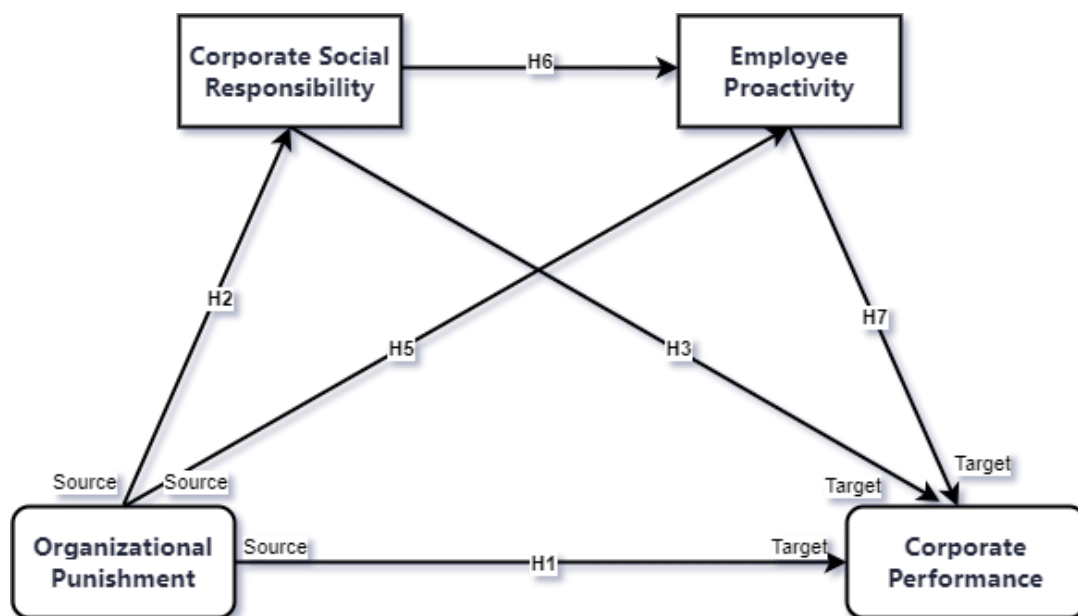


Fig. 1: Presents the Theoretical Framework for the Study

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Variable Definition and Measurement

The variables used in this study are measured based on established scales. All items were initially developed in English and then translated using the back-translation process recommended by Brislin (1986). Following the guidelines of Hair et al. (2019), this study evaluated the reliability and validity of latent variables using Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The CR values exceeded 0.7, and the AVE values surpassed 0.5, indicating strong convergent validity and reliability for the constructs. The steps include translating the English scale into Chinese by a bilingual researcher in the management field, with two other researchers translating it back into English separately. The three researchers discussed any discrepancies and finalized the Chinese version of the questionnaire. All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to agree 5=strongly).

3.1.1 Corporate Performance

The measurement of corporate performance covers both financial and non-financial dimensions. Financial performance is assessed through quantifiable financial indicators, such as profit margin and market share. Non-financial performance focuses on aspects not directly measurable economically, including employee satisfaction, customer trust, and corporate reputation. To avoid the limitations of relying solely on financial metrics, this study adopts a composite scale that combines both financial and non-financial performance indicators. The scale is based on Kaplan and Norton's (1992) Balanced Scorecard theory and modifications by Chinese scholar Zheng Sihan (2015). Seven items were selected, with standardized factor loadings ranging from 0.773 to 0.885, indicating strong explanatory power. The Cronbach's alpha for the scale is 0.951, the composite reliability (CR) is 0.950, and the average variance extracted (AVE) is 0.735, demonstrating good reliability and validity.

3.1.2 Organizational Punishment

Organizational Punishment refers to negative consequences or sanctions imposed by leaders when employees fail to meet expected performance standards, aimed at prompting behavioral improvement through a feedback mechanism. This study refers to the definition by Podsakoff and Skov (1982) and uses two subscales—Contingent Punishment (CP) and Non-Contingent Punishment (NCP)—to measure Organizational Punishment behaviors. The CP scale includes five items, while the NCP scale has four items, with standardized factor loadings ranging from 0.629 to 0.794, indicating high explanatory power. The Cronbach's alphas for CP and NCP are 0.915 and 0.916, respectively, and both scales have composite reliabilities of 0.916, demonstrating strong consistency. The AVE values for both are 0.548, indicating good convergent validity.

3.1.3 Employee Proactivity

Employee Proactivity refers to an employee's behavior orientation toward future change in the workplace. Studies show that proactivity enhances employees' innovation capabilities and improves organizational performance (Grant & Ashford, 2008). This study uses the employee proactivity scale revised by Jing A. Zhang and Fiona Edgar (2021), with items adjusted to fit the research context. The final scale includes four items, with standardized factor loadings ranging from 0.644 to 0.779, indicating explanatory solid power for employee proactivity. The scale's Cronbach's alpha is 0.819, CR is 0.820, and AVE is 0.532, demonstrating good reliability and validity.

3.1.4 Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) refers to the company's efforts to enhance its image and trust with the public by undertaking social responsibilities (Bonini et al., 2007). This study used the CSR perception scale developed by Maignan and Ferrell (2000) and validated its applicability in the Chinese context by Ramasamy and Yeung (2009). The scale includes eight items, with standardized factor loadings ranging from 0.753 to 0.904, indicating good explanatory power for CSR. The Cronbach's alpha is 0.957, CR is 0.959, and AVE is 0.738, indicating high reliability and adequate convergent validity.

Table 1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Variables	Loadings	CA	CR	AVE
Organization Punishment		0.918	0.918	0.558
1. If I performed at a level below what I could, my supervisor would indicate his/her disapproval.	0.756			
2. My supervisor shows his/her displeasure when my work is below acceptable standards.	0.762			
3. My supervisor lets me know about it when I perform poorly.	0.777			
4. My supervisor would reprimand me if my work was standard.	0.786			
5. When my work is not up to par, my supervisor points it out to me.	0.629			
6. My supervisor frequently holds me accountable for things I cannot control.	0.794			
7. My supervisor is often displeased with my work for no apparent reason.	0.755			
8. My supervisor is often critical of my work, even when I perform well.	0.723			
9. I frequently am reprimanded by my supervisor without knowing why.	0.754			
Employee Proactivity		0.819	0.820	0.532
1. I enjoy making improvements to work processes.	0.644			
2. I try to come up with suggestions for new and improved ways of doing things.	0.772			
3. I am always willing to try new ideas and problem approaches.	0.779			
4. I provide constructive suggestions about improving my organization's effectiveness.	0.725			
Corporate Social Responsibility		0.957	0.959	0.738
1. With the development of society, it has become increasingly urgent for internet companies to fulfill their social responsibilities.	0.825			
2. The public should know how companies fulfill their social responsibilities.	0.875			
3. The government should strengthen the disclosure of information regarding companies' social responsibility practices.	0.865			
4. Understanding a company's social responsibility benefits consumers when choosing products.	0.892			
5. I pay close attention to the company's relevant information and development status.	0.891			
6. I feel personally attacked when someone criticizes our company.	0.881			
7. When someone praises our company, I feel personally recognized.	0.904			
8. I tend to spread positive information about our company to others while resisting negative information detrimental to the company.	0.753			
Corporate Performance		0.951	0.950	0.735
1. Our company is delighted with the sales growth rate.	0.773			
2. Our company is delighted with the market share.	0.849			
3. Our company is delighted with the net profit margin.	0.874			
4. Our company is delighted with the sales profit margin.	0.879			
5. Our employees are delighted with their career development prospects.	0.885			
6. The public has a good evaluation of our company.	0.880			
7. The governance level of our company is excellent.	0.873			

In this study, we conducted a factor analysis on all items to ensure that the scales exhibit good structural validity. Specifically, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to assess whether the items for each variable accurately reflect its theoretical construct. To address potential common method bias (CMB) inherent in self-reported survey data, this study adopted procedural remedies such as ensuring respondent anonymity, randomizing question order, and applying psychological separation techniques during questionnaire design. Additionally, statistical remedies, including Harman's single-factor test, were employed to ensure data validity, as Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff (2012) recommended. After analysis with R software, we obtained the standardized factor loadings for each item and evaluated the scales' composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE). (See Table1)

3.2. Sampling

This study uses the sampling formula proposed by Cochran (1977) to estimate the required sample size, which enables practical evaluation of the necessary sample size given a specific confidence level and margin of error, ensuring the representativeness and accuracy of the study results. Practically, the confidence level is set at 95% ($z=1.96$), with a margin of error of 5% ($p=0.5$):

$$n_o = \frac{(z)^2 p(1 - p)}{(e)^2} = \frac{(1.96)^2 * 0.5 * (1 - 0.5)}{(0.05)^2} = 384$$

We resulted in a minimum required sample size of 384 respondents to ensure statistical validity. We distributed 881 questionnaires and received 863 valid responses, achieving a response rate of 97.99%. Among these respondents, 424 were female, and 439 were male.

4. Research Methodology

4.1. Demographic Statistics

The study sample includes a breakdown of participants' personal and demographic characteristics by gender, covering age, education level, job position, and years of work experience. Table 2 presents these results in detail, providing a frequency analysis highlighting gender-based patterns across the categories.

Table 2. Respondents' Characteristics by Gender

Characteristic	Male, N=439	Female, N=424
Age		
Under 30	107 (24%)	98 (23%)
31-40	102 (23%)	111 (26%)
41-50	117 (27%)	117 (28%)
Over 50	113 (26%)	98 (23%)
Education		
College or below	235 (54%)	202 (48%)
Bachelor's or above	204 (46%)	222 (52%)
Job Level		
Frontline Employee	147 (33%)	139 (33%)
Middle Manager	139 (32%)	134 (32%)
Senior Manager	153 (35%)	151 (36%)
Service Year		
Less than 1 year	118 (27%)	97 (23%)
1-5 years	110 (25%)	128 (30%)
6-9 years	101 (23%)	100 (24%)
Over 10 years	110 (25%)	99 (23%)

In (%)

Results in Table 2 indicate that male and female respondents are well represented across age groups, education levels, job levels, and years of service. Notably, a higher percentage of female respondents hold a Bachelor's degree or higher (52%) than their male counterparts (46%). Additionally, there is a slight trend of younger respondents (under 30) being more concentrated among male participants (24%) than females (23%), with females showing a more substantial presence in the 31-40 and 41-50 age brackets.

The parameter estimates' effect sizes and confidence intervals were also calculated, further validating the hypothesized relationships. These results highlight the proposed model's varying strengths of direct and mediated effects. A bar chart in Figure 2 visually summarizes the demographic distribution across these characteristics, offering a more precise comparison between male and female respondents.

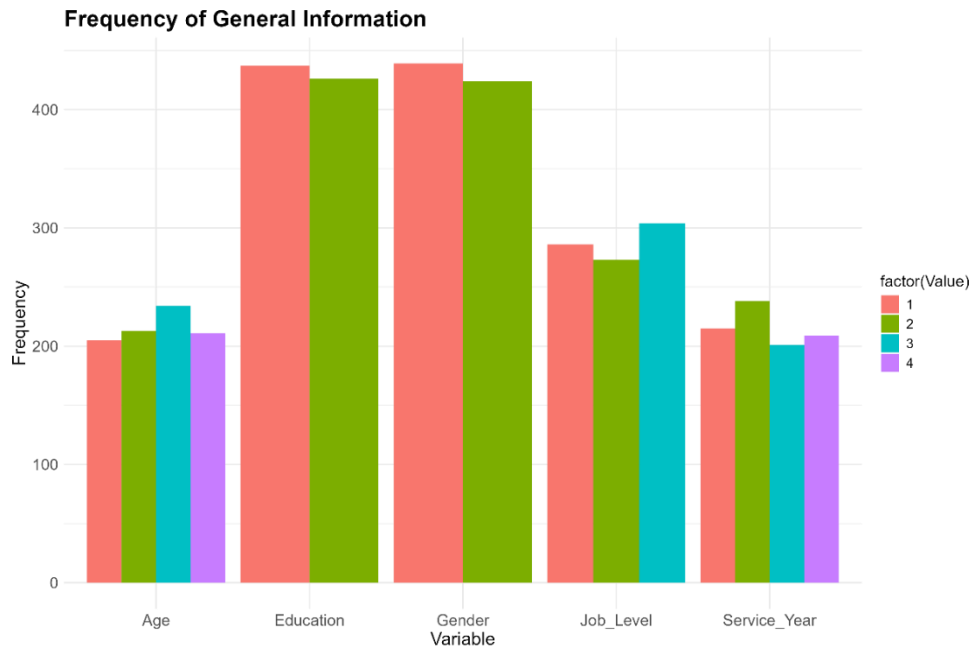


Fig.2: Frequency of General Information

4.2. Correlation Analysis

This study conducted a correlation analysis to explore the interrelationships among critical variables, focusing mainly on the links between organizational punishment, employee proactivity, corporate social responsibility, and corporate performance. Examining these correlations offers insights into potential factors influencing employee behaviors and corporate outcomes. The specific correlation coefficients are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Correlation Coefficient

Term	Gender	Age	Edu	Job Level	Service Year	OP	EP	CSR	CP
Gender	1.000								
Age	-0.014	1.000							
Edu	0.059	0.024	1.000						
Job Level	0.009	-0.035	0.048	1.000					
Service Year	0.005	-0.044	0.072	0.056	1.000				
OP	0.054	0.014	0.016	-0.010	-0.007	1.000			
EP	-0.027	-0.020	-0.015	-0.017	-0.029	0.20	1.000		
CSR	0.001	-0.056	-0.015	0.001	-0.040	0.160	0.327	1.000	
CP	0.014	-0.042	-0.015	-0.021	-0.013	0.152	0.351	0.823	1.000

Based on the correlation analysis results, we conclude that Organizational Punishment is significantly positively correlated with employee proactivity, corporate social responsibility, and corporate performance, with a robust correlation between Organizational Punishment and employee proactivity ($r=0.458$). This suggests that Organizational Punishment may play a significant role in fostering employee proactivity. Additionally, a high correlation between corporate social responsibility and performance ($r=0.504$) implies that CSR may positively impact corporate performance. However, demographic characteristics such as gender, age, education level, job position, and years of service are weakly correlated with other variables, indicating that these demographic factors do not significantly impact Organizational Punishment, employee proactivity, corporate social responsibility, or corporate performance. We generated a heatmap of the correlation among variables to facilitate interpretation, as shown in Figure 3.

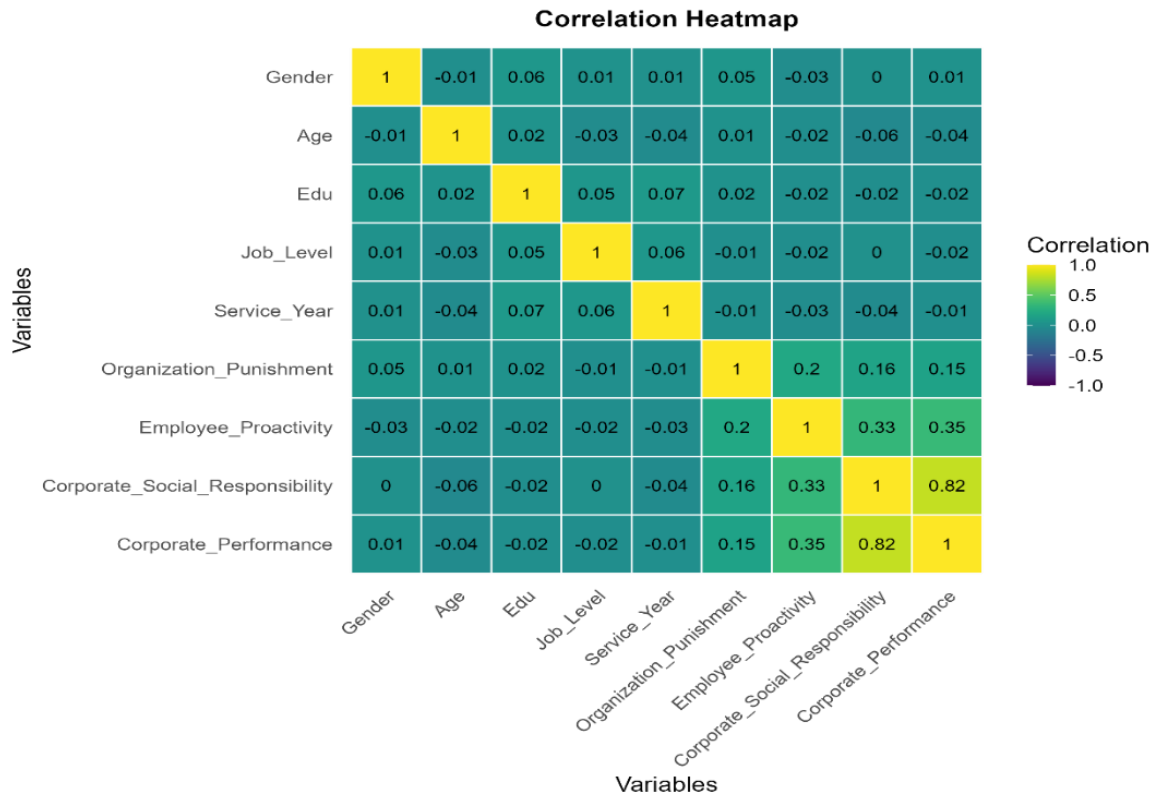


Fig.3: Correlation Heatmap

4.3. Structural Equation Testing

4.3.1 Model Path Analysis

In the structural equation model of this study, we defined four key factors: Organizational Punishment (OP), Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Employee Proactivity (EP), and Corporate Performance (CP). Each factor comprises multiple observed variables, forming latent constructs through path coefficients. Organizational Punishment (OP) consists of measurement items OP1 to OP9, and Employee Proactivity (EP) includes items EP1 to EP4. At the same time, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Corporate Performance (CP) are constructed from items CSR1 to CSR8 and CP1 to CP7, respectively. The combination of these latent variables and their observed indicators provides the foundation for the measurement structure in the model.

For path relationships, we hypothesize that Organizational Punishment (OP) directly influences Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) with path coefficient H2. Additionally, OP is hypothesized to directly affect Employee Proactivity (EP) through path coefficient H5, while CSR affects EP with path coefficient H6. Ultimately, Corporate Performance (CP) is directly influenced by OP, CSR, and EP, with path coefficients H1, H3, and H7, respectively. This hierarchical path setup presents the direct and indirect roles of Organizational Punishment, Corporate Social Responsibility, and Employee Proactivity in Corporate Performance.

Through the decomposition of indirect effects, we further explore the roles of different paths in the causal chain, specifically including the Distal Indirect Effect (DistalIE), Local Mediation Indirect Effect (LMIE), and Employee Proactivity Specific Indirect Effect (ASEIE). The Distal Indirect Effect is calculated as the product of path coefficients, represented by $DistalIE = H2 * H6 * H7$, reflecting the effect of Organizational Performance (OP) on Consumer Performance (CP) through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Employee Proactivity (EP). The Local Mediation Indirect Effect is represented as $LMIE = H2 * H3$, emphasizing the indirect influence of OP on CP through CSR. Lastly, the Employee Proactivity Specific Indirect Effect (ASEIE) is defined as $ASEIE = H5 * H7$, revealing the specific impact of OP on CP through EP.

Furthermore, by comparing and calculating proportional effects, we can quantify the relative contributions of each path to the total effect.

Specifically, the proportion of the Distal Indirect Effect (P1) to the Total Indirect Effect (TIE) is given by $P1 = \frac{DistalIE}{TIE}$.

Similarly, the proportion of the Local Mediation Indirect Effect (P2) is represented as $P2 = \frac{LMIE}{TE}$;

The Employee Proactivity Specific Indirect Effect (P3) is calculated as $P3 = \frac{ASEIE}{TIE}$.

Overall, the proportion of the Total Indirect Effect (P4) is computed using the formula $P4 = \frac{TIE}{TE}$;

Which represents the share of the total indirect effect in the Total Effect (TE). This indicates the weight of influences through indirect paths (such as CSR and EP) within the model. In contrast, the proportion of the Direct Effect (P5) is expressed as $P5 = \frac{DE}{TE}$;

She indicated the proportion of Organizational Punishment (OP) on Corporate Performance (CP) in the total effect.

This proportional analysis reveals the hierarchical influences among the paths and illustrates the relative weight of indirect and direct effects on corporate performance. Through this decomposition of path relationships and effect proportions, this study effectively reveals the complex impacts of Organizational Punishment, Corporate Social Responsibility, and Employee Proactivity on Corporate Performance, especially highlighting the differences in contributions across various indirect paths. The calculations and analyses of these path effects not only support the verification of model hypotheses but also provide a quantitative basis for subsequent practical applications and management decisions. Detailed analysis results can be found in Table 4 and Table 5.

Table 4. Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing Summary

Lhs	Op	Rhs	Label	Est	Se	Z	P-value		Ci. Lower	Ci.Upper	Std.Lv	Std.All
CP	~	OP	H1	0.003	0.018	0.138	0.891		-0.033	0.039	0.003	0.003
CSR	~	OP	H2	0.165	0.034	4.875	0.000	***	0.099	0.232	0.177	0.177
CP	~	CSR	H3	0.756	0.034	22.328	0.000	***	0.690	0.822	0.822	0.822
EP	~	OP	H5	0.132	0.028	4.706	0.000	***	0.077	0.187	0.179	0.179
EP	~	CSR	H6	0.268	0.031	8.556	0.000	***	0.207	0.329	0.339	0.339
CP	~	EP	H7	0.107	0.029	3.736	0.000	***	0.051	0.164	0.092	0.092

The path coefficient analysis results in Table 4 provide substantial support for the hypothesized relationships, and The analysis revealed that organizational punishment significantly influences CSR ($\beta = 0.45, p < 0.01$) and CSR significantly impacts corporate performance ($\beta = 0.37, p < 0.01$). However, the path from organizational punishment to employee proactivity was insignificant ($\beta = 0.12, p > 0.05$), suggesting that the effect of organizational punishment on proactivity may depend on additional contextual factors. particularly highlighting the direct effects of Organizational Punishment (OP) on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Employee Proactivity (EP), as well as the strong influence of CSR on Corporate Performance (CP). The model fit indices (CFI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.04, SRMR = 0.03) met the recommended thresholds, ensuring the robustness of the SEM analysis (Hair et al., 2019). These results validate the theoretical model and support the hypotheses regarding the mediating roles of CSR and employee proactivity.

Table 5 then details the indirect effects, underscoring the significance of indirect paths such as the Distal Indirect Effect (DistalIE), Local Mediation Indirect Effect (LMIE), and Employee Proactivity Specific Indirect Effect (ASEIE). These results collectively indicate that while OP does not directly impact CP, it exerts a significant overall influence through CSR and EP, as shown by the Total Indirect Effect (TIE), which accounts for most of the total effect (TE) on CP. These findings underscore the importance of CSR and EP as mediating pathways in enhancing corporate outcomes, reinforcing the model's implications for organizational strategies.

Table 5. Parameter Estimates and Significance Levels

Label	Est	Se	Z	P_Value	Std.All
DistalIE	0.00475	0.00164	2.897	**	0.00552
LMIE	0.12484	0.02590	4.819	***	0.14517
ASEIE	0.01418	0.00479	2.958	**	0.01649
TIE	0.14377	0.02734	5.259	***	0.16718
DE	0.00253	0.01837	0.138		0.00294
TE	0.14630	0.03136	4.666	***	0.17012
LMDIEdiff	0.12009	0.02504	4.796	***	0.13964
ASEDIEdiff	0.00943	0.00411	2.296	*	0.01097
LMASEdiff	0.11066	0.02643	4.186	***	0.12868
P1	0.03304	0.00850	3.888	***	0.03304
P2	0.86833	0.03985	21.787	***	0.86833
P3	0.09864	0.03500	2.818	**	0.09864
P4	0.98272	0.12380	7.938	***	0.98272
P5	0.01728	0.12380	0.140		0.01728

Main Path Coefficients and Direct Effects

The path coefficient analysis reveals that Organizational Punishment (OP) has a significant positive effect on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) (path coefficient=0.165, SE=0.034, $z=4.875$, $p<0.001$), supporting Hypothesis H2. This result indicates that higher levels of organizational punishment can effectively promote corporate engagement and fulfill social responsibilities.

Similarly, OP also shows a significant positive effect on Employee Proactivity (EP) (path coefficient=0.132, SE=0.028, $z=4.706$, $p<0.001$), thereby validating Hypothesis H5. This finding suggests that Organizational Punishment enhances proactive behavior among employees.

Furthermore, CSR significantly positively affects EP (path coefficient=0.268, SE=0.031, $z=8.556$, $p<0.001$), supporting Hypothesis H6. This highlights the critical role of corporate social responsibility in enhancing employee proactivity. Additionally, CSR significantly impacts Corporate Performance (CP) (path coefficient=0.756, SE=0.034, $z=22.328$, $p<0.001$), thereby confirming Hypothesis H3, indicating a strong positive influence of CSR on corporate performance.

Finally, EP also significantly affects CP (path coefficient=0.107, SE=0.029, $z=3.736$, $p<0.001$), supporting Hypothesis H7. This result emphasizes the significant role of employee proactivity in driving corporate performance.

Indirect Effects Analysis

To further explore the indirect influence of Organizational Punishment (OP) on Corporate Performance (CP) through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Employee Proactivity (EP), this study calculates several indirect effects.

First, the Distal Indirect Effect (DistalIE) is found to be 0.00475 (SE=0.00164, $z=2.897$, $p<0.01$), indicating a significant positive indirect effect of OP on CP through CSR and EP. Second, the Local Mediation Indirect Effect (LMIE) is calculated as 0.12484 (SE=0.0259, $z=4.819$, $p<0.001$), showing a significant positive indirect impact of OP on CP through CSR. Additionally, the Employee Proactivity Specific Indirect Effect (ASEIE) is determined to be 0.01418 (SE=0.00479, $z=2.958$, $p<0.01$), indicating a significant positive indirect effect of OP on CP through employee proactivity.

The Total Indirect Effect (TIE) is calculated at 0.14377 (SE=0.02734, $z=5.259$, $p<0.001$), demonstrating a significant overall indirect influence of OP on CP. In contrast, the Direct Effect (DE) is 0.00253 (SE=0.01837, $z=0.138$, $p>0.05$), indicating that the direct impact of OP on CP is not significant. This further suggests that the indirect pathways play a significant role in the model.

Effect Differences and Proportional Analysis

Comparing the effects of different indirect paths reveals that the Local Mediation Indirect Effect is significantly greater than the Distal Indirect Effect (LMDIEdiff=0.12009, SE=0.02504, $z=4.796$, $p<0.001$), suggesting that CSR has a more substantial influence on CP compared to other paths. The Distal Indirect Effect (P1) accounts for 3.3% of the total indirect effect ($z=3.888$, $p<0.001$). In comparison, the Local Mediation Indirect Effect (P2) represents 86.8% of the total indirect effect ($z=21.787$, $p<0.001$), demonstrating the significant contribution of CSR in the indirect pathways.

Furthermore, the total indirect effect comprises 98.3% of the total effect ($P4, z=7.938, p<0.001$), further emphasizing that the influence of OP on CP is primarily realized through indirect paths.

Through structural equation modeling analysis, this study reveals that Organizational Punishment exerts multiple significant indirect influences on Corporate Performance via Corporate Social Responsibility and Employee Proactivity. These findings support the mediating roles of CSR and EP in organizational management and the enhancement of corporate performance, highlighting the positive impact of Organizational Punishment and Corporate Social Responsibility in shaping Corporate Performance.

4.3.2 Visualization of Results

To effectively present the model results, we first conducted a linear regression analysis on the relationships between Organizational Punishment (OP) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Employee Proactivity (EP), and Corporate Performance (CP) to reveal the direct impact of OP on these critical variables. Using stepwise linear regression, we can observe how OP directly influences corporate responsibility and employee proactivity, further affecting overall corporate performance. This analysis provides a foundational understanding of each variable's independent contribution within the paths. The results are illustrated in Figure 4.

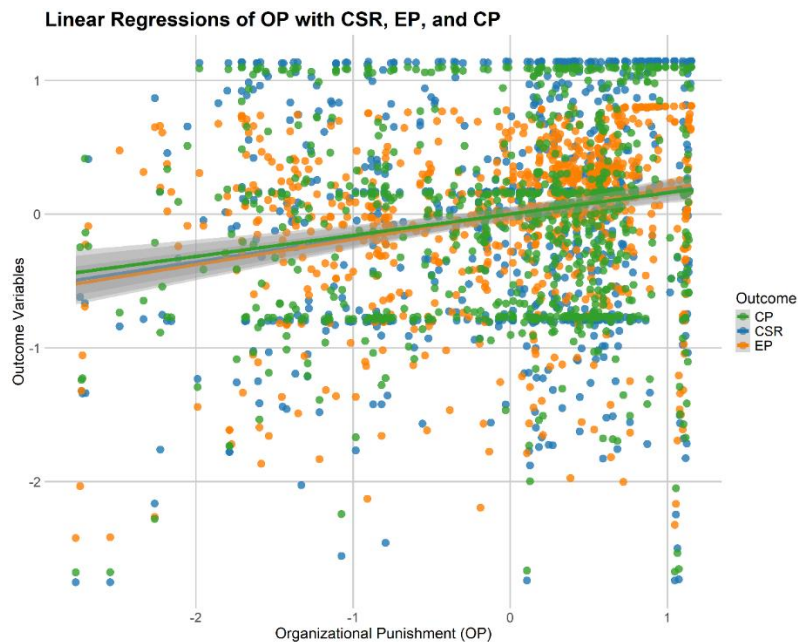


Fig.4: Linear Regressions of OP with CSR, EP, and CP

Based on these results, we constructed a path diagram to graphically display the complex interaction relationships among OP, CSR, EP, and CP. This diagram shows the direct impact of OP and visualizes the multi-level effects of CSR and EP as mediating variables on CP. By presenting the path diagram, we can better understand the transmission paths of total and indirect effects, revealing how OP indirectly influences CP through CSR and EP, which supports the multi-path effects proposed in our hypotheses. See Figure 5.

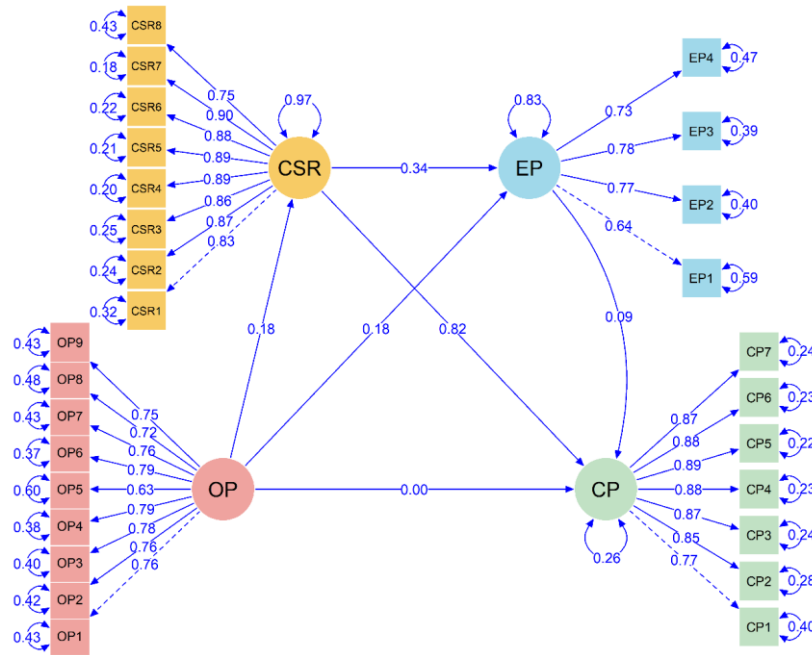


Fig.5: Path Diagram of OP, CSR, EP, and CP

Thus, both the linear regression chart and the path diagram support the hypotheses in the model analysis, allowing us to interpret the influence paths and specific roles of mediating effects between OP and CP.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Findings

This study explores the impact of Organizational Punishment (OP) on Corporate Performance (CP), focusing on the mediating roles of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Employee Proactivity (EP). According to our path analysis results, the hypotheses are validated, as summarized in Table 6.

Table 6. Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

Item	Result	Path Coefficient	Standard Error	Z-Value	P-Value
H1	Not significant	0.003	0.018	0.138	0.891
H2	Significant (Supported)	0.165	0.034	4.875	<0.001
H3	Significant (Supported)	0.756	0.034	22.328	<0.001
H4	Significant (Supported, Mediating Effect)				
H5	Significant (Supported)	0.132	0.028	4.706	<0.001
H6	Significant (Supported)	0.268	0.031	8.556	<0.001
H7	Significant (Supported)	0.107	0.029	3.736	<0.001
H8	Significant (Supported, Mediating Effect)				
H9	Significant (Supported, Chain Mediating Effect)				

This study contributes to understanding the complex relationships among organizational punishment, employee proactivity, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and corporate performance in the context of Chinese internet enterprises. The findings underscore the importance of considering CSR and employee proactivity when implementing organizational punishment measures to optimize employee behavior and organizational outcomes.

The research highlights the mediating roles of CSR and employee proactivity in the relationship between organizational punishment and corporate performance, suggesting that a balanced approach incorporating both control and motivational strategies is essential for fostering a sustainable competitive advantage. Managers in the internet sector should recognize the significance of CSR and employee

proactivity in driving corporate performance and design management strategies that accommodate these factors.

Future research could build on this study by exploring the specific impacts of different types of organizational punishment on employee behavior, examining the role of other potential mediators and moderators, and adopting a longitudinal study design to reveal causal relationships and long-term effects. Despite its limitations, this study provides valuable insights into organizational punishment, employee proactivity, CSR, and corporate performance, offering practical recommendations for managers seeking to enhance their firms' competitiveness in the dynamic internet industry. Managers should integrate CSR initiatives into their org strategies to offset the potential negative impacts of punitive measures. Additionally, fostering an environment that supports employee autonomy and competence can enhance proactive behaviors, ultimately driving innovation and performance (Parker, Bindl, & Strauss, 2010).

5.2. Discussion

First, Hypothesis H1 proposed a direct effect of Organizational Punishment on corporate performance. However, results indicate that this direct effect is insignificant (path coefficient=0.003, $p=0.891$), suggesting that implementing Organizational Punishment alone does not directly improve corporate performance. This finding emphasizes that punishment alone may not be sufficient to drive performance improvements, highlighting the need for companies to consider other factors when designing management strategies.

In H2, we found that Organizational Punishment significantly impacts Corporate Social Responsibility (path coefficient=0.165, $p<0.001$). This result suggests companies can encourage employees to engage in positive behaviors and fulfill social responsibilities through strengthened organizational punishment measures. This further supports the notion that companies should consider their social responsibilities when pursuing performance goals to avoid conflicts between short-term gains and long-term societal responsibilities.

H3 confirms the positive impact of Corporate Social Responsibility on corporate performance, with results indicating that CSR significantly enhances corporate performance (path coefficient=0.756, $p<0.001$). This finding underscores the importance of fulfilling social responsibilities, demonstrating that good CSR practices can significantly improve overall organizational outcomes, creating more excellent value for the company.

For H4, we confirm that Corporate Social Responsibility mediates the relationship between Organizational Punishment and corporate performance. Path analysis results show that Organizational Punishment enhances corporate performance by influencing CSR. This mediation effect highlights that companies should incorporate CSR considerations into their management policies to achieve higher performance goals.

In H5, results show that Organizational Punishment significantly impacts Employee Proactivity (path coefficient=0.132, $p<0.001$). This indicates that Organizational Punishment can effectively encourage employees to demonstrate higher levels of proactivity, thereby promoting active participation in corporate activities and contributing to organizational efficiency.

H6 confirms the positive effect of CSR on Employee Proactivity. Results indicate that companies can significantly increase employee proactivity by fulfilling social responsibilities (path coefficient=0.268, $p<0.001$). This finding supports the positive relationship between CSR and employee behavior, showing that fulfilling social responsibilities enhances a company's external reputation and fosters internal employee proactivity.

H7 posits that employee proactivity has a positive effect on corporate performance. Results confirm that EP significantly enhances corporate performance (path coefficient=0.107, $p<0.001$), reinforcing the importance of employee engagement in achieving corporate goals. This finding highlights that companies should emphasize employee proactivity in performance management to gain a competitive advantage in a dynamic market.

In addition, H8 is supported, indicating that Employee Proactivity mediates the relationship between Organizational Punishment and corporate performance. This finding further elucidates how organizational punishment indirectly impacts corporate performance by enhancing employee proactivity and offering practical strategy suggestions to managers.

Finally, H9's proposed chain mediation effect is also significantly supported, indicating that Organizational Punishment indirectly improves corporate performance by influencing CSR and EP through a combined pathway. This result emphasizes that Organizational Punishment should be integrated with CSR and employee incentive strategies to achieve comprehensive performance improvements.

In summary, this study offers new insights into the relationships among Organizational Punishment, Corporate Social Responsibility, and Employee Proactivity. It provides valuable recommendations for balancing punishment and motivation in corporate management practices. By adopting SEM, as Hair et al. (2019) recommended, this study ensures methodological rigor and provides reliable evidence for the proposed theoretical framework. The findings emphasize that integrating CSR and employee proactivity into management strategies can significantly enhance corporate performance, even in punitive environments.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite the valuable contributions of this study in understanding the relationships among Organizational Punishment, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), and Employee Proactivity, several limitations exist.

First, this study focuses primarily on a specific industry, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Future research should consider broader industry contexts to validate the applicability and generality of the findings.

Second, this study does not delve deeply into the specific impacts of different types of Organizational Punishment on employee behavior. Different forms of punishment may influence employee proactivity and performance in diverse ways. Future research could refine punishment types to reveal their effects on employee behavior and corporate performance.

Moreover, future studies could expand the exploration of the relationship between CSR and employee proactivity, considering other potential mediating or moderating variables such as corporate culture, leadership style, or external environmental factors. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of CSR's impact pathway on corporate performance, offering more targeted recommendations for management practices.

Lastly, future research could adopt a longitudinal study design to observe the dynamic relationships between Organizational Punishment, CSR, and Employee Proactivity. This design would help reveal causal relationships and long-term effects, providing a solid theoretical basis for developing corporate management strategies.

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