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Examining the Impact of Issue Salience, Issue Proximity, Situational Motivation, and Communicative Behaviors on Environmental CSR Outcomes

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Abstract: Climate change has become a life-threatening problem. Guided by the Situational Theory of Problem Solving (STOPS), the main goal of this experimental study is to understand the relationship between issue salience, issue proximity, communicative behavior for environmental issues, situation motivation for climate change, and environmental CSR (ECSR) supportive outcomes. This study used a U.S. sample (N = 440) recruited from a Qualtrics online panel and conducted a 2 (issue salience: salient vs. non-salient) × 2 (issue proximity: local vs. global) experimental design to examine the role of issue salience and issue proximity on individuals' environmentally friendly CSR outcomes. The structural equation model indicated that issue proximity has no significant impact, but issue salience impacted communicative behavior for environmental issues, which then predicted ECSR-supportive behavioral intentions. Importantly, most STOPS research has employed situational motivation as a mediator, but this study took a novel approach by assessing the impact of situational motivation as an independent variable on CAPS as well as environmental CSR outcomes. The results suggest that individuals with a higher motivation to solve the problem of climate change are not only likely to communicate about environmental issues (e.g., air pollution) with others but are also likely to support ECSR programs through positive word-of-mouth and higher purchase intentions. This study provides some noteworthy theoretical and practical contributions in the realm of ECSR communication by elucidating the impact of issue types and individuals' communicative behaviors in supporting a company's ECSR programs.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility; issue proximity; issue salience; climate change; situational motivation; Situational Theory of Problem Solving

Citation: Bhalla, N. Examining the Impact of Issue Salience, Issue Proximity, Situational Motivation, and Communicative Behaviors on Environmental CSR Outcomes. *Sustainability* **2022**, *14*, 2763. https://doi.org/10.3390/su14052763

Academic Editors: Hyejoon Rim and Holly Overton

Received: 1 February 2022
Accepted: 23 February 2022
Published: 26 February 2022

1. Introduction

By 2030, over 100 million people may fall back into extreme poverty due to climate change [1]. Thousands of studies conducted by global climate scientists have documented rising temperatures at the earth's surface, oceans, and atmosphere [2], which could not only lead to serious natural calamities but also could result in the displacement of millions of people [3]. Climate change is increasingly becoming a life-threatening problem. Multinational corporations (MNCs) are coming forward to support the cause of climate change through their environmental corporate social responsibility (ECSR) initiatives. Environmentally friendly CSR programs by MNCs can develop favorable consumer attitudes and purchase intent [4]. However, there is a dearth of literature that has examined the impact of environmental issue type and proximity on consumers' environmental CSR (ECSR) supportive behavioral intentions.

Overton [5] (2018) used the Situational Theory of Publics (STP) theoretical framework in a study and did not find any moderating impact of different issue types (general vs. specific) on communicative behavior and CSR-supportive intentions. However, the author stated that "future research should also examine more and different types of environmental issues" (p. 341). Furthermore, it is quite understandable that U.S. consumers support

companies implementing ECSR initiatives related to salient issues such as air pollution [6], but will they also support ECSR initiatives related to non-salient issues such as land degradation by a foreign company? What are the potential factors that may impact their behavioral intentions towards non-U.S. ECSR initiatives and the company? Thus, an important question that remains to be answered is the extent to which companies should become involved in less salient and/or foreign environmental issues.

Van der Linden [7] suggested that "future research could focus on making environmental messages related to impact and causes more local and personally relevant" (p. 122). This study aims to address these concerns by examining the proximity of environmental issues. Rooted in Situational Theory of Problem Solving (STOPS), this study examines the impact of salient vs. non-salient environmental issues locally vs. globally on individuals' communicative action, which can further influence their ECSR-related behavioral intentions. Additionally, this study makes a noteworthy contribution by examining the impact of situational motivation as an independent variable on CAPS as well as environmental CSR outcomes. This study will explore whether situational motivation for an anchor issue (climate change, which impacts almost everyone) can predict communicative behaviors for other environmental issues (air pollution in this study) and ECSR-supportive behavioral intentions.

By drawing upon and integrating environmental psychology literature (e.g., [7,8]) and public relations literature (e.g., [9]), this study presents a transdisciplinary model of CSR communication. In this study, the author examines the role played by the salience of the environmental issue and by issue proximity in influencing individuals' perceptions towards a company and its environmentally friendly initiatives. The findings of this study may provide some important implications for environmentalists, as well as multinational organizations, for developing and communicating environmental (CSR) messages effectively, by identifying and targeting their key stakeholders to garner their support.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Environmental Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been defined as a voluntary philanthropic activity conducted by an organization towards society or environment [10,11]. Falck and Heblich [12] define CSR as "a voluntary corporate commitment to exceed the explicit and implicit obligations imposed on a company by society's expectations of conventional corporate behavior" (p. 247). However, CSR is no longer considered as an optional initiative or "fringe activity" in organizations today, but has become an integral part of the business strategy [5,13].

In 1994, author John Elkington coined the term "triple bottom line," which has been used by many researchers to define CSR [14]. The triple bottom line stresses the three P's, people, profit and planet, which are related to the concern for society, earning profits, and protecting the environment [10]. Among different types of CSR initiatives, corporations are adopting environmental CSR practices at an increasing rate to ameliorate or reduce the negative impact of their operations on the environment [15–17].

Literature suggests that CSR initiatives that reflect ethical concerns toward the environment can develop a more positive brand image and customer satisfaction [18], rebuild after a crisis [19,20], enhance company reputation [21,22], help bring a positive market attitude towards the organization [17,23], and improve monetary performance [24]. Literature also indicates the importance of effective CSR communication to achieve organizational legitimacy and success [25]. Thus, organizations are required to develop strategic CSR communication plans to target key stakeholders and understand the impact of CSR programs on audiences [11,26].

Scholars have applied multiple public relations theories, largely in the realm of enhancing CSR communication, such as the Situation Theory of Publics (STP) [5] and Situational Theory of Problem Solving (STOPS; [27,28]) to understand key variables that can impact individuals' CSR-supportive behavioral intentions. Thus, CSR scholarship is growing, but

little is known about how issue types and communicative behavior related to an environmental issue can influence individuals' attitudes towards ECSR initiatives. This study aims to bridge this gap, and growing concern towards environmental issues warrants more research in this area.

2.2. Communicative Behavior and Situational Perception

To understand consumers' situational perceptions (i.e., motivation) and communicative behavior towards environmental issues, this manuscript employs STOPS [9]. STOPS is a theory of communication that uses the conceptual framework of STP [29] and introduces a new concept—Communicative Action in Problem Solving (CAPS). Kim and Grunig [9] expanded on the communicative dependent variable of the STP (information acquisition) to a generalized dependent variable, namely communicative action in problem-solving. This is a second-order variable and explains how actively or passively an individual seeks information to find a solution to a problem. In this study, CAPS is used to measure consumers' communicative behavior towards different environmental issues.

2.3. Impact of CAPS on Environmental CSR Outcomes

Jiang and colleagues [30] used the Situational Theory of Problem Solving (STOPS) to examine Chinese citizens' communicative behavior and environmental engagement behavior towards the salient issue of the particulate matter (PM) 2.5 air pollution problem in China. They found that communicative behavior effectively predicts environmental engagement behavior. In another related study, Overton [5] used the Situational Theory of Publics (STP) and examined the impact of communicative behavior (information seeking) on environmental CSR-supportive intentions. Overton [5] argued that communicative behavior (information seeking) can predict behavioral intentions such as engaging in positive word-of-mouth communication about a company's CSR programs and evaluating company's altruistic intentions. Thus, based on a review of the literature, this study hypothesizes the following:

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *Communicative Action in Problem Solving (CAPS) related to environmental issues is positively associated with purchase intentions (a), positive word-of-mouth communication about company's CSR programs (b), and general environmental CSR support (c).*

2.4. Impact of Situational Perceptions on CAPS

STOPS posits that the individuals who perceive the existence of the problem (problem recognition), perceive some sort involvement with the problem (involvement recognition), and perceive no constraints in finding the solution of the problem (constraint recognition) are motivated to find solutions (situational motivation) and are more likely to communicate about the problem with others (CAPS).

Situational motivation in problem solving is defined as "a state of situation-specific cognitive and epistemic readiness to make problem-solving efforts" [9] (p. 132). Situational motivation sums up and mediates the effect of three independent and perceptual variables—problem recognition, involvement recognition, and constraint recognition [9,31]. Krishna [32] further argued that "conceptually, the presence of [situational] motivation assumes problem perceptions" (p. 1089). Based on this argument, scholars have posited situational motivation in problem solving as a proxy measure for situational perceptions (see [27,32]). Situational motivation varies depending on the type of the problem and the particular situation or time.

In this study, individuals who strongly recognize the climate change problem, their involvement, and fewer constraints in solving the issue of climate change were more likely to have higher situational motivation to solve the problem of climate change. Higher situational motivation results in individuals engaging in a variety of active communicative behaviors to find solutions to the problem [33,34].

The literature also suggests that, when an individual is motivated to solve a problem, he/she not only communicates to solve the problem but also is more likely to have high motivation and communicative behaviors for other related issues. This process is called the Problem Chain Recognition (PCR) effect [9]. Kim and Ni [35] contend that the PCR effect can be applied to important social issues such as environmental concerns. Thus, this study hypothesizes the following:

Hypothesis 2 (H2). *Individuals' situational motivation to solve the problem of climate change is positively related to their communicative action in problem solving for various environmental issues.*

2.5. Impact of Situational Perceptions on CSR Communication

Increasingly, literature has focused on the STOPS framework in the context of corporate communication to understand individuals' perceptions and communicative behaviors towards organizations, such as investigations of the public's communicative behaviors for a government crisis [36], consumers' perceptions, motivations, and communication behaviors in regard to corporate misconduct related to workplace gender discrimination [27], and the connections between consumers' situational perceptions and (anti)corporate outcomes [34]. There is a dearth of literature that connects consumers' situational motivation with CSR-supportive behaviors in the context of environmental communication. Given that individuals' motivation about one anchor issue may trigger communicative behavior for related issues [9], and scholars have already shown that consumers' motivation for an issue can trigger communicative behaviors for an organization (see [28,34]), this study proposes the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3 (H3). *Situational motivation related to climate change is positively associated with purchase intentions (a), positive word-of-mouth communication for ECSR programs (b), and general environmental CSR support (c).*

2.6. Impact of Environmental Issues on CSR Communication

2.6.1. Issue Salience as an Independent Variable

Ciuk and Yost [37] defined issue importance as "the concern, care, and significance the individual attaches to the attitude object—the issue in question" (p. 330; also see [38]). This hot sociopolitical issue "has received extensive media coverage" [39] (p. 145). Due to a high amount of media attention, people have received more information related to the issue and thus have formed an opinion or attitude towards the issue, resulting from information abundance in the memory [40]. Thus, issue salience is related to an individual's discretion in attaching importance to an issue. In this study, individuals identified the most salient (important) issue as air pollution and the most non-salient (least important) environmental issue as land degradation.

Grunig [41] argued that when an issue affects almost everyone, such as air pollution, which is the concern in this study, a special environmental group that otherwise would not be concerned with environmental issues emerges. This group is more likely to be aware of other environmental issues and corporations' ECSR programs. Major [42] argues that the media coverage of a salient environmental issue such as air pollution may play as a key role in determining the communicative behavior of the public. People become aware and recognize problems that are salient issues through media coverage as well as first-hand experience, such as air pollution in a smog-filled city as compared to non-salient issues, such as a shortage of landfills, with which they may not have first-hand experience. Based on the literature, the study hypothesizes the following:

Hypothesis 4 (H4). *A salient environmental issue will result in a higher degree of Communicative Action for Problem Solving (CAPS) related to environmental issues.*

2.6.2. Issue Proximity as an Independent Variable

Studies have emphasized the importance of the proximity or spatial distance variable for realizing the impact of environmental problems and motivating pro-environmental behaviors among individuals [8]. Scholars suggested that individuals consider spatially distant environmental problems as personally non-relevant and discount the risk of the issue [7,43,44]. The probable explanation suggested by literature is that individuals consider the consequences of environmental problems or climate change to be happening to "other" people in geographically "distant" places [8,45], which is related to the psychological phenomenon of "optimism bias" [46] and "third person effect" [47].

Individuals consider local environmental issues more salient and relevant [48], and this results in more engagement [49]. Rayner and Malone [50] argued that a greater relevance and a more local impact of environmental issues also instigates individuals to act in an environmentally friendly way to mitigate the consequences of climate change. Furthermore, local pro-environmental actions can act as a catalyst for long-term behavior change, which can influence a local society to begin a broader range of environmentally beneficial activities [51].

Räthzel and Uzzell [52] raised a question related to what is "global," i.e., is it a developing continent such as Asia or Africa, where the impact of climate change is more prominent but there are minimal resources to deal with it, or is it a place such as Greenland, where glaciers are quickly melting? They suggested that global is a relational concept, and "it can only be defined from a specific position, and from any specific position the global is elsewhere" (p. 329). In this study, the term local is considered when an environmental issue takes place in an individual's country, e.g., the U.S., and the term global is considered when an environmental takes place in another continent, e.g., Asia. In a multi-cultural study, scholars reported that the perceived individual responsibility for tackling environmental problems was highest at the local level and decreased if the problem was in another country or continent [53]. In an experimental study, Scannell and Gifford [54] found that local messages were more effective and resulted in higher engagement among respondents towards environmental issues. Thus, this study proposes the following hypothesis (see Figure 1):

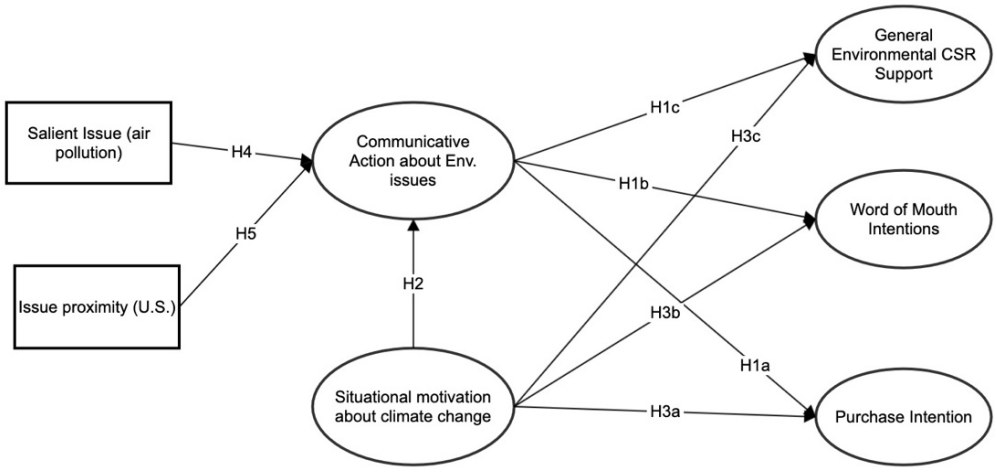

Figure 1. Conceptual model with hypotheses.

Hypothesis 5 (H5). *Local environmental issues will result in a higher degree of Communicative Action in Problem Solving (CAPS) for environmental issues.*

3. Methods

3.1. Design and Procedures

A general Qualtrics U.S. population was used as the sample for this study. A total of 440 participants were recruited from a Qualtrics online panel for this study in March 2019. Each respondent provided implied consent, and the survey was approved by the university's institutional review board. After completing the consent form, participants were asked to rate the extent of their knowledge about climate change using a 7-point semantic-differential scale with anchors of "not at all" and "to a great extent". If respondents chose "not at all," they were removed from the survey and taken to the last page of the survey. Using Qualtrics, a quality check was implemented to measure the response completion time and survey completion time. Participants who completed the survey in under five minutes were removed from the final sample. Moreover, two attention-checking questions were also embedded within the survey, and participants who failed such questions were removed from the final sample. A pretest was conducted to identify the two types of environmental topics used in the study: a salient topic and a non-salient topic. A total of 45 U.S. residents were recruited using Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) for conducting this pre-test. Participants from the pretest sample were not included in the final sample. Twenty environmental issues were presented to participants to test the degree to which they feel each issue is salient issue or non-salient. Participants were asked to rate the degree to which they felt each environmental issue was salient or non-salient using a 7-point semantic-differential scale with anchors of "least salient" and "most salient". Participants were instructed to evaluate a topic as a salient issues based on whether they are important and well known.

"Harmful pollutants from vehicular and factories emission causing air pollution" was rated as the most salient issue with the highest mean score (M = 5.62, SD = 1.23) and "land degradation" was rated as a non-salient issue with the lowest mean score (M = 3.80, SD = 1.66). A paired samples t-test was conducted, and there was a significant mean difference in the salience of these two issues, $t(45) = 5.21$, $p < 0.5$. Thus, the study included "land degradation" as a non-salient environmental issue, while "harmful pollutants from vehicular and factories emission causing air pollution" was included as a salient issue.

3.2. Sample

Quotas based on age, gender, and political affiliation were instituted to ensure the sample of the study approximated the population of the U.S. (United States Census Bureau, 2018). The sample (N = 440) included an almost equal number of males (50.5%) and females (48.6%). The majority of the sample (82.3%) were Caucasian with a mean age of 51 years. The majority of the sample had a household income in the range of $20,000–$80,000. Regarding educational qualifications, 35.2% respondents were high school graduates, followed by 24.3% respondents who had a bachelor's degree and 23% respondents who had an associate degree. Almost half of the sample (45.5%) had a Democratic political party affiliation, followed by 28.2% who had an Independent political party affiliation, and 23.9% who had a Republican political party affiliation. Full sample demographics are reported in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents (N = 440).

Demographic Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Mean	SD
Gender				
Male	222	50.5%		
Female	214	48.6%		
Other	4	0.9		
Age			51.1	17.22

Table 1. *Cont.*

Demographic Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Mean	SD
Annual Household Income				
$0–20,000	73	16.6		
$20,001–40,000	97	22.0		
$40,001–60,000	84	19.1		
$60,001–80,000	73	16.6		
$80,001–100,000	47	10.7		
$100,001–120,000	31	7.0		
$120,001–140,000	10	2.3		
More than 140,000	25	5.7		
Education				
Less than High School	8	1.8		
High school graduate	155	35.2		
Associate degree (AA, AS)	101	23.0		
Bachelor's degree (BA, BS)	107	24.3		
Master's degree (MA, MS, MBA, M.Ed., etc.)	54	12.3		
Professional degree (MD, DDS, DLLB, JD, etc.)	14	3.2		
Doctorate degree (Ph.D., Ed.D.)	1	0.2		
Race/Ethnicity				
Black/African American	31	7.0		
Caucasian	362	82.3		
Asian/Pacific Islander	16	3.6		
Hispanic/Latino	23	5.2		
Arab/Middle-Eastern	1	0.2		
Others	7	1.6		
Political Affiliation				
Democratic	200	45.5		
Republic	105	23.9		
Independent	124	28.2		
Others	5	1.1		
Prefer not to disclose	6	1.4		

3.3. Stimulus Material

The stimulus material included exposure to a manipulated message related to the geographical distance and salience of an environmental issue presented in the form of a blog post of a fictitious company. Each of the stimuli were a company blog entry with text related to salient (air pollution) and non-salient (land degradation) issues taking place in the U.S. vs. Asian countries. Each stimulus contained two paragraphs. The first paragraph described the issue, presented in accordance with the locality of the issue. It discussed the gravity of the environmental issue by highlighting the damage to nature and mankind. The second paragraph discussed the corporation's CSR initiatives to control the environmental damage in Asia vs. the U.S. The word count in every stimulus (across conditions) was almost equal (i.e., within a few words) to maintain control over the effects of the stimulus.

3.3.1. The Manipulation of the Geographical Distance of the Environmental Issue

The environmental issue was operationalized as a global and local issue. To manipulate the location of the issue, words such "Asian" and "America/US" were used judiciously. The names of the fictitious companies were created to most accurately reflect names common within each geographical location. For example, "Woodward Motors" was used for the American environmental issue, and "Moonlight Motors" was used for the Asian environmental issue.

3.3.2. The Manipulation of the Salience of the Environmental Issue

The manipulated company blog entry related to issue salience included a description of the environmental issue. The company blog entries also included images related to the salient issue (air pollution) and the non-salient issue (land degradation).

3.4. Measures

The measures of this study were adopted from existing research, and all items were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. The key variables of the modified STOPS model (Figure 1), i.e., situational motivation in problem solving, and six communicative actions (information seeking, information attending, information permitting, information sharing, information forefending, and information forwarding) were adapted from Kim and Grunig [9], Jiang et al. [30], and Krishna [32]. The Cronbach's alpha score for the situational motivation scale was 0.89, and six communicative actions ranged from 0.81 to 0.91. After examining reliability, these six communicative actions were combined to create the CAPS scale.

General environmental CSR support was measured using three items adapted from Kim [21]. The Cronbach's alpha score for this scale was 0.93. The word-of-mouth intention was measured using three items adapted from Rim and Song [55]. The Cronbach's alpha score for this scale was 0.95. Purchase intent was measured using five items on a 7-point semantic differential scale adapted from Spears and Singh [56]. The Cronbach's alpha score for this scale was 0.96.

3.5. Manipulation Checks

Two questions assessed the effectiveness of experimental manipulations. The first question examined whether participants were able to identify the environmental issue in different experimental conditions. A crosstabs analysis revealed significant differences in how U.S. participants identified different issue types in the company's blog entry, $\chi^2(3, N = 434) = 361.82$, $V^* = 0.91$, $p < 0.001$. Thus, the manipulation was successful. The second question assessed the manipulation of the location of the environmental issue in different experimental conditions. A crosstabs analysis revealed significant differences in how the U.S. participants identified the country of the environmental issue, $\chi^2(3, N = 426) = 316.97$, $V^* = 0.86$, $p < 0.001$. Thus, the manipulations were successful.

4. Results

4.1. Preliminary Analysis

SPSS (version 25) was used for preliminary analysis. For analyses, the geographical location of an environmental issue and issue salience variables were converted into dichotomous variables. The U.S. was dummy-coded as 1, and Asia as 0. Similarly, the salient issue was coded as 1, and the non-salient issue as 0. Later, the data were transferred to R software to perform Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and a Structural Equation Model (SEM). Before conducting the analysis, data were screened for normality prior to the path analysis. The skewness and kurtosis estimate values were not extreme such that their values were less than |3.00| and |8.00|, respectively, so data were treated as approximately normally distributed [57]. Moreover, we obtained ordinal data using the Likert scale (which is never continuous, i.e., normal), but there were seven categories, and if the data had univariate normality with low skew and kurtosis values, it was deemed acceptable to use a normal theory estimator such as Maximum Likelihood.

4.2. Model Evaluation Criteria

To evaluate the CFA and SEM models as well as the model-data fit indices, the variations explained by the model in the dependent variable indicated by R2 and parameter estimates in the model were observed. Multiple fit indices such as χ^2, the comparative fit index (CFI), the Tucker–Lewis index (TLI), the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) were considered to

test the approximate fit of the model. A higher χ^2 value with $p > 0.5$ indicated a model-data misfit. However, χ^2 may not be the best indicator, as it is sensitive to sample size, especially for a sample comprising more than 200 observations [58], and provides a dichotomous decision regarding the exact fit of a model to the data; however, our interest was to find the approximate fit of a model. The ratio of χ^2/df was also considered so as to determine the model fit, as a ratio value of 3 or above is considered an acceptable fit [58]. CFI values of 0.9 or greater were considered indicative of an acceptable overall fit [59], with a cutoff point close to 0.95 representing a good fit [60]. RMSEA values of less than 0.08 and SRMR values of less than 0.10 [61] or close to 0.09 [60] were considered indicators of a well-fitting model.

4.3. Structural Model Assessment

The hypothesized model was examined using the model-fit indices. The model displayed a good global model-data fit, as χ^2 (219) = 487.83; χ^2/df = 2.2 [>3 is considered as good fit], p = 0.00; CFI = 0.970; TLI = 0.966; RMSEA = 0.054 (90% CI: 0.048, 0.060); SRMR = 0.045). The significance of the individual paths is shown in Figure 2.

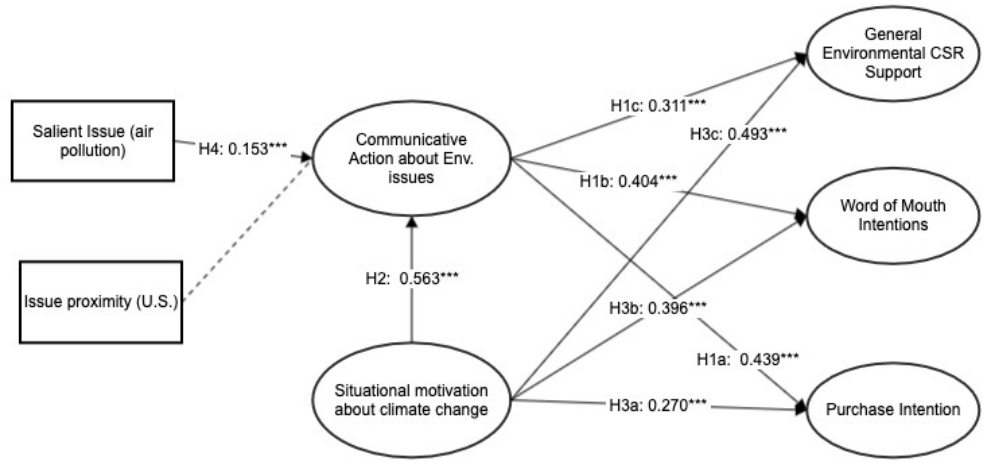

Figure 2. Final tested model. χ^2 = 487.83; df = 219; χ^2/df = 2.23; CFI = 0.970; TLI= 0.966; RMSEA = 0.054 [90% CI: 0.048, 0.060]; SRMR = 0.045. Note: All reported regression weights are standardized. *** $p < 0.05$. Dotted line indicates no relationship.

4.4. Hypotheses Testing

The first hypothesis predicted positive relationships between the CAPS for environmental issues and CSR outcomes, and was supported, as there were direct positive relationships between CAPS and purchase intentions (b = 0.439, $p < 0.01$), positive word-of-mouth communicative intentions (b = 0.404, $p < 0.01$), and general environmental CSR-supportive intentions (b = 0.311, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that individuals with higher communicative behaviors for environmental issues (e.g., air pollution) are likely to support ECSR programs by talking positively about it and purchasing products/services from company-implemented ECSR initiatives.

Furthermore, H2 predicted a positive relationship between situational motivation for climate change and CAPS. The hypothesis was supported, as there was a direct positive relationship between situational motivation for climate change and CAPS for environmental issues (b = 0.563, $p < 0.01$). This is an interesting finding, which suggests that individuals with higher motivation to solve the problem of climate change are likely to communicate about environmental issues (e.g., air pollution) with others.

Next, H3 predicted positive relationships between the situational motivation for climate change and CSR outcomes. There were direct positive relationships between situational motivation and purchase intentions (b = 0.270, $p < 0.01$), positive word-of-mouth communicative intentions (b = 0.396, $p < 0.01$), and general CSR-supportive intentions (b = 0.493, $p < 0.01$). The results indicated that individuals with higher motivation to solve

the problem of climate change are more likely to support ECSR programs through positive word-of-mouth and purchase intentions.

The prediction in H4 was that a salient issue will result in a higher degree of CAPS related to environmental issues, and it was supported ($b = 0.153$, $p < 0.01$), as the salient issue (air pollution) was directly related to CAPS for environmental issues. This finding suggests that the higher the salience of an environmental issue, the higher the chances are that individuals will discuss it with others.

In H5, the prediction that a local environmental issue will result in a higher degree of CAPS related to environmental issues was made. Furthermore, H5 was not supported ($b = 0.060$, $p = 0.150$), as issue proximity was not related to CAPS. The results indicate that an individual's likelihood to communicate about an environmental issue does not depend on the location of the environmental issue.

5. Discussion

Using the STOPS theory, this study aimed to examine how individuals' motivations and perceptions related to various environmental issues can impact their ECSR behavioral intentions. Using issue salience and issue proximity as manipulated variables, this study conducted an online experiment with 440 U.S. residents to understand how the communicative behaviors towards different environmental issues mediates issues types and ECSR-supportive behavioral intentions. This study made some novel contributions in the realm of CSR and STOPS research, as the results indicated that a salient issue (air pollution in this study) influenced the communicative behavior for environmental issues, which then predicted ECSR-supportive behavioral intentions.

The results indicated that issue proximity has no impact on communicative behaviors for environmental issues and ECSR-supportive behavioral intentions. This indicates that U.S. consumers are more likely to support CSR initiatives related to salient issues such as air pollution, irrespective of the country of the CSR programs. These results are in tandem with CSR literature such as Bhalla and Overton [6], who argued that U.S. participants support ECSR initiatives by U.S. companies irrespective of the location of CSR programs. Most environmental psychology literature argues that U.S. consumers have higher motivation levels to tackle local environmental problems, as compared to global problems [8,53], but our results indicate that U.S. consumers are motivated to tackle a salient environmental problem by supporting ECSR programs irrespective of the location of the environmental problem.

Additionally, the STOPS literature has mostly used situational motivation as a mediator (see [28,33,34]), but this study took a novel approach by assessing the impact of situational motivation as an independent variable on CAPS as well as environmental CSR outcomes. It is also interesting to note that the situational motivation for an anchor issue (climate change, which impacts almost everyone) predicted not only communicative behaviors for other environmental issues but also ECSR-supportive behavioral intentions. These results are partially supported by past research such as that of Chon and Kim [28], who used situational motivation as a mediator and successfully predicted ECSR communicative behaviors (such as megaphoning).

5.1. Theoretical and Practical Implications

Overall, the contributions of this study are multifold, and include the following: (1) This study investigated the impact of participants' attitudes towards different environmental issues on their environmental CSR-supportive intentions. (2) This study examined the importance of the salience and location of environmental issues and its impact on participants' communicative behaviors and environmental CSR-supportive intentions. (3) This study found a relationship between communicative behavior for environmental issues and behavioral intentions to support environmental CSR initiatives. (4) This study supports the use of situational motivation for climate change (an anchor issue) as an independent variable, which then predicted communicative behaviors for environmental issues and

ECSR programs. (5) The findings from this study provide significant contributions towards theory development in STOPS and CSR research and have important implications for public relations practitioners, environmentalists, and multinational organizations seeking to develop and communicate ECSR messages effectively to key stakeholders so as to garner their support in mitigating the impact of climate change.

Practically, for organizations who are engaging in ECSR, it is not only imperative to create and communicate environmentally friendly messages to individuals but also important that these messages are related to salient environmental issues as defined by their key stakeholders. The literature suggests that the salience of an issue may vary among individuals, as it is related to the attention given by individuals to a single issue [62]. Thus, organizations should first perform research to understand the importance of the salient issue for their stakeholders before investing in environmental CSR initiatives. There are many factors that play an important role in defining environmental issue salience for a corporation's stakeholders, such as the location of the issue and experience with the issue, such as air pollution or water pollution, in a local area. Furthermore, sometimes stakeholders consider an issue as salient based on the amount of media coverage received, such as air pollution in Asian countries. Thus, public relations professionals and corporations need to be extra careful to understand the motivation and perceptions of their stakeholders so that they can develop effective communication strategies and deliver more tangible results through their environmental CSR initiatives.

As situation motivation for climate change can directly impact individuals' CSR-supportive behavioral intentions, it is vital for corporations, governments, and nonprofits to identify their key audiences, who believe in climate change and seek to protect natural biodiversity. This would allow for effective audience segmentation and thus the effectual strategic communication of their ECSR programs, which will yield positive results for corporations. This is also supported by literature, as Eng et al. [63] suggested, " . . . the more individuals feel connected to, and are concerned about, the environment, the more likely they are to hold positive attitudes towards the effectiveness of their purchasing decisions in helping to combat the climate crisis" (p. 10). Furthermore, individuals with higher motivations to mitigate the effects of the climate crisis are likely to have higher intentions to support corporations with a strong commitment to protecting the environment, and "individuals who possess high levels of supportive intentions are more likely to follow through with actual purchasing behaviors" [63] (p. 11).

As mentioned above, corporations should consider individuals' commitments to protecting the environment for effective target segmentation before launching ECSR programs to reap financial benefits; it is also advised that corporations consider other variables such as consumers' age [64] and value systems [63], as these variables can influence their intentions to support CSR initiatives.

Given the insignificant relationship between environmental issue proximity and communicative behaviors for environmental issues, this research advocates the view that multinational organizations should often support global environmental causes by effectively implementing and communicating ECSR programs, as U.S. individuals are more likely to support their ECSR initiatives, irrespective of the location of the issue. Understanding the salient issue and effectively implementing the related ECSR programs will strategically connect the company with their global and local target audience, which can further invoke their motivations and communicative behaviors to support ECSR programs.

This study provided an integrated theoretical model that can not only be applied to ECSR communication but also to communicate CSR programs related to other critical issues, such as gun violence (as an anchor issue). Using this model, corporations can benefit by understanding and identifying motivated individuals so as to curb gun violence, as they are likely to have high communicative behaviors for other related issues such as hate-motivated violence or unintentional gun shootings (especially among children). They are also likely to support corporations that have implemented CSR programs to address gun violence and related issues.

Additionally, it will be interesting to apply this model in a non-industrial context such as universities. Universities can identify their climate crisis warriors among their stakeholders to effectively launch their ECSR programs. As studies show that universities' ECSR programs can influence students' pro-environmental behavior [65], applying this model can serve two purposes—(1) students will support universities' pro-environment CSR programs through high communicative behaviors, and (2) this will also have a rippling effect, as these students will join different industries and can become environmental ambassadors in their organizations to launch ECSR programs.

5.2. Limitations and Future Research

In light of the findings of this study, its limitations should also be acknowledged. There are some chances of social desirability affecting the results due to the controversial and societal nature of the topic of climate change and environmental issues, which can impact the generalizability of the findings. In addition, this study only included those participants that self-reported that they know at least a little bit about climate change. The generalizability of the findings of this research is limited to Qualtrics users from the United States. The fact that this study used fictitious companies to create its stimulus material can impact the ecological validity of the study. The mean age of the sample of this study is 51.1 years, and the literature suggests that older adults have higher intentions to support CSR programs [63], which may impact the findings of this study. Future studies can consider these limitations and use a real company, include a more generalizable sample, and consider measuring participants' pre-involvement with environmental issues used in the study.

6. Conclusions

Through a 2 × 2 experimental design, this study examined the influence of issue salience and issue proximity on ECSR-supportive behavioral intentions. Guided by the Situational Theory of Problem Solving (STOPS), this study found that Communicative Action for Problem Solving (CAPS) mediated the impact of issue salience on ECSR-supportive behavioral intentions, such as purchase intentions and positive word-of-mouth intentions. This study contributes to the CSR literature by filling the gap regarding the effects of different environmental issues on communication behaviors and ECSR-supportive behavioral intentions. Additionally, this study sheds light on the independent effect of individuals' situational motivation for climate change on their communicative behavior for environmental issues and ECSR-supportive behavioral intentions. The findings of this study provide important implications for environmentalists as well as for multinational organizations (MNCs), in terms of developing and communicating ECSR messages effectively to key stakeholders so as to garner their support in mitigating the impact of climate change. This study is timely, as the devastating impact of climate change is burgeoning.

Funding: This research is a part of a larger project funded from two sources: (a) the Arthur W. Page Center for Integrity in Public Communication at the Pennsylvania State University (agreement no: 2018OC005); and (b) a SPARC graduate research grant from the University of South Carolina (proposal no: 15600-18-46768).

Institutional Review Board Statement: All respondents gave their informed consent for inclusion before they participated in the study. The study was approved by the University of South Carolina's Institutional Review Board (ID: Pro00086725).

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data will be made available upon request.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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