

# Modeling the Relationship Among Perceived Corporate Citizenship, Firms' Attractiveness, and Career Success Expectation

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**Abstract** Drawing on propositions from the signaling theory and expectancy theory, this study hypothesizes that the perceived corporate citizenship of job seekers positively affects a firm's attractiveness and career success expectation. This study's proposed research hypotheses are empirically tested using a survey of graduating MBA students seeking a job. The empirical findings show that a firm's corporate citizenship provides a competitive advantage in attracting job seekers and fostering optimistic career success expectation. Such findings substantially complement the growing literature arguing that corporate citizenship brings firms competitive advantages without solid evidence from the perspective of recruitment and human resources. Finally, managerial implications and limitations of this study are also discussed.

**Keywords** Corporate citizenship · Organizational attractiveness · Career expectation · Ethical citizenship · Discretionary citizenship

## Introduction

Recruiting superior human resources provides organizations with a sustained competitive advantage (Wright et al. 1995). An important step in recruitment is to increase a firm's attractiveness and career success expectation of job seekers. Firms that attract more qualified applicants (i.e., job seekers) have a larger number of applicants to select from, leading to greater utility for firm recruitment activities and stronger organizational competitive advantages in the future (Williamson et al. 2003).

Previous studies have called for more research to assess the determinants that affect a firm's attractiveness and career success expectation during the applicant generation phase of recruitment (e.g., Rynes 1991; Williamson et al. 2003). Whereas a firm's attractiveness is defined as the envisioned benefits that individuals see in working for a specific firm, career success expectation is defined as the expected future accomplishments of individuals in their work lives (Bozionelos 2006). The literature on applicant generation has heavily emphasized the influence of recruitment ads (or brochures) or selection procedures on individuals' perception of a firm's attractiveness (Saks et al. 1995). The studies have found that these ads pass on attractive information about a firm's attributes to potential job seekers, which in turn affect the people's intention to pursue employment opportunities at the firm (Williamson et al. 2003). Unfortunately, while some knowledge regarding the use of information in print recruitment materials to attract job applicants has been somewhat

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developed, little is known about how job seekers actually interpret the information they receive as signals about a firm's working conditions (Turban and Greening 1996). Thus, the signaling theory may be useful for understanding the formation of a firm's attractiveness and career success expectation of job seekers, which is used to build this study's research model.

Propositions based on the signaling theory indicate that a firm's attributes offer job seekers information about what it would be like to be a staff of the firm, because such attributes are interpreted as information about the firm's working conditions (Turban and Greening 1996). Among various firm attributes, corporate citizenship is one of the most critical attributes that attract potential applicants by serving as a signal of a firm's working conditions (Turban and Greening 1996). Indeed, a firm's corporate citizenship helps foster a strong signal about working conditions thereby denoting certain organizational values and norms (i.e., a firm's attractiveness) (Turban and Greening 1996). Job seekers are likely attracted to a firm they view as having values and norms they deem important (Chatman 1989). Since a firm's corporate citizenship mainly shows key values and norms, it is highly probable that such citizenship increases job seekers' perception of a firm's attractiveness and career success expectation.

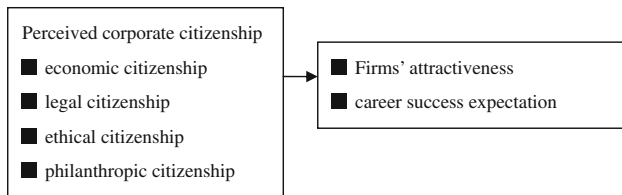
Corporate citizenship—also known as corporate social responsibility (CSR), sustainable responsible business, responsible business, corporate responsibility, and corporate social performance—encompasses corporate self-regulation norms and values that are integrated into business and organizational models (Lin 2010). Corporate citizenship represents organizational activities and status related to the organization's societal and stakeholder obligations (Luo and Bhattacharya 2006). A growing interest for corporate citizenship shows up in both practice and academics, discussing how business organizations incorporate social demands into their operations and what benefits the organizations may expect (Maignan and Ferrell 2001). Examples of benefits from corporate citizenship for business organizations may result in the ability to achieve corporate financial success (Johnson and Greening, 1994), to obtain certain consumer purchase intention (Vandermerwe and Oliff 1990), to enhance employees' job satisfaction, to boost work engagement, to encourage organizational citizenship behavior, or to increase business performance (e.g., Carmeli et al. 2007; Lin 2010; Lin et al. 2010; Maignan and Ferrell 2001). Nevertheless, previous research has rarely clarified how different dimensions of corporate citizenship can benefit a firm by boosting a firm's attractiveness and career success expectation of job seekers, which is an important research gap explored by this study.

This study differs from previous research in two important ways. First, previous research has rarely looked into whether a firm's attractiveness and career success expectation are both motivated by perceived corporate citizenship, which is the focus herein. Second, some studies linking corporate citizenship to its outcomes (e.g., a firm's attractiveness) do not examine how each individual's dimension of such citizenship (i.e., economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic citizenship) affects the outcomes. For that reason, this study evaluates four dimensions of perceived corporate citizenship regarding their effects in the formation of a firm's attractiveness and career success expectation, which is quite important as some research has failed to take the multi-dimensional nature of corporate citizenship into account from people's psychological perspective (e.g., De los Salmones et al. 2005). Based on the critical advantages of our research study indicated above, a clear understanding of how perceived corporate citizenship actually drives a firm's attractiveness and career success expectation can be effectively established.

## Research Model and Development of Hypotheses

### Conceptual Model

Researchers have emphasized that a firm's initial attraction to job seekers is based on their perceptions of the firm's image, which is largely influenced by its corporate citizenship (e.g., Rynes 1991). Many large business companies, such as IBM, Starbucks, and Microsoft, send out messages to prospective applicants promoting their companies' economic, environmental, and philanthropic practices, suggesting that many firms use corporate social responsibility as a key recruitment tool (e.g., Poe and Courter 1995). Drawing on propositions from the signaling theory and expectancy theory (Rynes 1991), this study proposes that perceived corporate citizenship increases a firm's attractiveness and career success expectation. The signaling theory offers rationales for why job seekers are attracted to apply for a job. The theory emphasizes that since job seekers are often unable to know a firm in depth, they recall their prior knowledge or experience about the firm's attractiveness as a signal to direct their job pursuit intention (e.g., Breugh 1992; Rynes 1991). Meanwhile, the expectancy theory suggests a job-seeking process based on future career expectation, such that job seekers are more likely to invest their limited time and resources into pursuing and talking about a job that shows the best future career success (Rynes and Lawler 1983; Rynes 1991; Wanous et al. 1983). In summary, Fig. 1 provides the proposed model of this study.



**Fig. 1** Conceptual model

### Dimensions of Corporate Citizenship

Corporate citizenship consists of four dimensions refined from previous literature in terms of employees as stakeholders: (1) economic citizenship, referring to the firm's obligation to bring utilitarian benefits to its employees such as a quality working environment, training, and education; (2) legal citizenship, referring to the firm's obligation to fulfill its business mission within the framework of legal requirements; (3) ethical citizenship, referring to the firm's obligation to abide by moral rules defining society's proper behavior; and (4) philanthropic citizenship, referring to the firm's obligation to engage in activities that are not mandated, not required by law, and not expected of a business in an ethical sense (Lin 2010). As corporate citizenship incorporates organizational actions on social issues, it can be expected that the above four corporate citizenship dimensions represent values and norms that are prevalent in a particular firm (Greening and Turban 2000), thus creating attractiveness in an organization that job seekers would like to work for. Indeed, experts argue that many firms have to find various ways of attracting superior job seekers by strengthening, for example, various opportunities for career development (i.e., economic citizenship) (Terjesen et al. 2007), law-abiding images (i.e., legal citizenship), reputable moral cultures (i.e., ethical citizenship) (e.g., Albinger and Freeman 2000; Sargent and Matthews 1999), and contributions of the improved well-being of society (i.e., philanthropic citizenship) (e.g., Hiltrop 1999).

### Effects of Corporate Citizenship on Firms' Attractiveness

Each dimension of corporate citizenship is considered to be a key job-seeking clue that positively increases a firm's attractiveness (Backhaus et al. 2002), because potential applicants evaluate positive outcomes about their future job from being employed by a firm that engages in more socially responsible actions (Turban and Greening 1996). Job seekers use various clues related to the firm to draw conclusions about the firm's actions (Srivastava and Lurie 2001). Clues about certain corporate citizenship draw job seekers' close attention to potential employers (Backhaus et al. 2002), suggesting a positive effect of corporate

citizenship on a firm's attractiveness. The rationales for such a positive effect are further justified in detail as follows.

First, the necessary and foremost social responsibility of a firm is economic in nature, because a firm is a basic economic unit in society (Carroll 1979) that takes care of its employees or other stakeholders (Maxfield 2008; Turker 2009). As such, it has a responsibility to provide good working conditions, training, education, and payoff (i.e., forms of economic corporate citizenship) while producing goods (or services) and selling them at a profit (Cable and Judge 1994; Weyzig 2009). Supportive career relationships between employees and their firm (e.g., payoff, compensation, training, and education) signify that the firm is the one worth working for (Aiman-Smith et al. 2001), thus boosting organizational attractiveness for potential job seekers. Indeed, Gatewood et al. (1993) find that people's attractiveness ratings of corporate image are significantly associated with the reported probability of applying for a position with the firm (Casper and Buffardi 2004).

Second, members of society expect a firm to fulfill its mission within the framework of legal requirements (Carroll 1979). When job seekers perceive, for example, serious gender or racial discriminations against the law in a firm, they will be worried that they could fall victim to such organizational transgressions, damaging the firm's attractiveness. Previous evidence supports the theoretical rationales described above based on the signaling theory, such that job seekers report they are more attracted to pursuing jobs at a firm that has a better reputation in obeying legal systems (Belt and Paolillo 1982; Gatewood et al. 1993; Lefkowitz 2006).

Third, an important way for linking a firm's ethical citizenship and a firm's attractiveness is through inferences drawn from how the firm ethically treats people. Individuals' perceptions are heavily affected by how fair they consider a firm's actions to be ethical (Cropanzano et al. 2001). People often count on ethical fairness to justify whether a firm is attractive, nonbiased, and will treat them as legitimate members of the firm (Rupp et al. 2006). When a firm treats various stakeholders (including its employees and job seekers) ethically, the job seekers are more likely attracted to seek a long-term employment relationship with the firm (Schwepker 2001), suggesting a positive relationship between perceived ethical citizenship and a firm's attractiveness.

Fourth, a survey reveals that more than half of UK working professionals care very much about the social and environmental responsibilities of their firm (Dawkins 2004). A firm's formal social policies (e.g., philanthropic programs) toward stakeholders and its caring about social issues serve as a clue for the firm's goal that substantially attracts potential job seekers (Greening and Turban 2000).

People are more likely to apply for a job at a firm when the firm has a more favorable corporate image of dedicating itself to public welfare and social benefits. For example, previous research finds that firms with greater corporate social performance, particularly in philanthropic scopes, are perceived as being more attractive employers than other firms with lower corporate social performance (Bauer and Aiman-Smith 1996; Turban and Greening 1997). Large firms, such as GM, Oracle, and Mary Kay Inc., routinely present information about philanthropic and environmental programs during their recruitment processes, suggesting that these firms use positive philanthropic citizenship as a recruitment strategy (e.g., Highhouse et al. 2003). Consequently, the next hypothesis is developed as below.

**H1** A firm's attractiveness is positively driven by (a) perceived economic citizenship; (b) perceived legal citizenship; (c) perceived ethical citizenship; and (d) perceived philanthropic citizenship.

#### Effects of Corporate Citizenship on Career Success Expectation

Similar to the preceding rationales about the positive effects of corporate citizenship on a firm's attractiveness, four corporate citizenship dimensions are hypothesized to also have positive effects on career success expectation (i.e., future career success in the firm). Firms that project a positive corporate citizenship image bring about enchanting expectations for job seekers, desirable job attributes, and strong future opportunities for career growth and success within the firms (Ramasamy et al. 2008). As suggested by Rynes (1989), the expectancy theory indicates that job seekers are more likely to pursue job alternatives when the job is perceived to bring positive career (high valence) expectation (Turban and Cable 2003). In other words, given a firm's attractiveness, job seekers may be discouraged to apply for a job if they perceive difficulty in obtaining future career success under such a job post. The rationales for the positive relationship between the four dimensions of corporate citizenship and career success expectation are further discussed in detail as follows.

First, previous research emphasizes that career development and training (i.e., economic citizenship) represent the promised relational obligations for employees' career (Robinson and Morrison 1995), thus strengthening their future expectation about their career. The existence of perceived economic citizenship that governs internal career mobility and systems in the organization help fosters job seekers' expectations regarding, for example, their anticipated career potential to top management (Sheridan et al. 1990). Previous research on career development (Lent et al. 1994) highlights the importance of learning and

developmental relationships (i.e., economic citizenship) in elevating expectations of career success (Sosik et al. 2004). Another example regarding results obtained from a sample of 1,388 U.S. professional managers suggests that organizational economic variables (such as cash compensation, promotions, etc.) explained significant variance in expected career success (Judge et al. 1995), suggesting a positive relationship between economic citizenship and career success expectation (e.g., Aryee et al. 1994).

Second, given that career success refers to a sense of mastery and control over one's career development, if employees are reluctantly forced by their firm to work under illegitimate environments or conditions out of their control, then they are unlikely to expect future career success—that is to say, people attempt to pursue a job expected to have career advancement in the legal boundary (e.g., Callanan 2003). A firm that skirts the law delivers a message to potential job seekers regarding their high risk of pursuing such a job career in the firm, thus discouraging their career success expectation (Varricchio 1999).

Third, ethics is a fundamental part of a performance culture in a successful firm (O'Donohue and Nelson 2009), and thus applicants' expectation about their career success can be enhanced if they work in a firm with strong ethical citizenship. By contrary, job seekers do not expect career success when working for a firm that treats others unethically (Grover 1993) suggesting a positive relationship between perceived ethical citizenship and career success expectation. Career success expectation will be attenuated if the work environment provided by the firm reveals the questionable likelihood of success, such as fraud and cheating business practices (i.e., unethical citizenship) (e.g., Deemer 1986; Godshalk and Sosik 2003; Goolsby and Hunt 1992; Lennick and Kiel 2005).

Fourth, the effect of philanthropic citizenship on career success expectation is positive, because philanthropic citizenship adds value to a job, facilitating an individual's internal career (e.g., Schein 1984). Previous literature stresses that the job career structure of every society evolves to fulfill the functions needed in that society (Schein 1984). On the one hand, when job seekers observe that a firm presents a quality of philanthropic citizenship (e.g., charities) that increases an intrinsic desire for the job seekers, their career success expectation is likely enhanced (Booth et al. 2009; Comer and Cooper 2002; Lee et al. 2008; Wright 2002). On the other hand, some philanthropic actions presented by a firm (e.g., protecting the natural environment and saving energy) help increase its credit and reliability (Lin 2010), in turn boosting job seekers' belief that they are likely to have a better chance at being successful in such a reliable firm.

When job seekers collectively perceive a firm as being ignorant about its employees' career development (i.e.,

economic citizenship), performing consumer fraud (i.e., legal citizenship), cheating on its business partners (i.e., ethical citizenship), or endangering living environments (i.e., philanthropic citizenship), they are less likely to have career success expectation. Hence, a hypothesis is derived as below.

**H2** Career success expectation is positively driven by (a) perceived economic citizenship; (b) perceived legal citizenship; (c) perceived ethical citizenship; and (d) perceived philanthropic citizenship.

## Methods

### Subjects and Procedures

The research hypotheses described in this study were empirically tested using a survey of graduating MBA students from ten large universities in Taiwan during their last semester before graduation. Note that these MBA students had been looking for a job during the last semester. Subjects were invited to fill out the surveys. In the beginning of the survey, 30 names of Taiwanese companies that are the most well-known across high-tech, traditional manufacturing, servicing, transportation, and banking and insurance industries were provided to research subjects for reference. The subjects were asked to select one of the companies they are familiar with as a target company to fill out our questionnaire.

Of the 1,000 questionnaires distributed to the subjects, 627 usable questionnaires were returned, for a response rate of 62.70%. In our sample, 290 participants are male (46.25%) and 337 participants are female (53.75%). Note that these graduating MBA students are appropriate research subjects for the topic of firms' attractiveness and career success expectation, because many firms strive to attract such highly educated students as important human resources. Firm's attractiveness and career success expectation are the first key issue these graduating students are concerned about right before their graduation as they are very concerned about the job market and employers during such time periods. By contrary, it would be inappropriate if working professionals across industries were surveyed by this research, because many employees may have gotten used to their job and have somewhat lost their initial expectation about career success.

### Measures

The research factors in this study are measured using 5-point Likert scales modified from prior literature (see Appendix A). Three steps are employed to design our

measurement items. First, the original items in the English language from prior research were first translated to Chinese language and then modified (or dropped in case of their inappropriateness in Chinese language) by a focus group of five persons familiar with organizational behavior research, including three graduate students and two professors. Second, following the questionnaire design, this study conducted two pilot tests (prior to the actual survey) to improve our questionnaire's readability and to assess the quality of our measurement items. Inappropriate items were repeatedly reworded or removed from our survey questionnaire because of their poor loadings in our exploratory factor analysis with the promax oblique rotation. Finally, the technique of back-translation proposed by Reynolds et al. (1993) was used to assess an English version questionnaire as well as a Chinese one by an outside professor who was not an author of this study. A high degree of correspondence between the two questionnaires (evaluated and confirmed by the outside professor) assures this research that the translation process did not introduce substantial translation biases in our questionnaire design.

For the survey of this study, we planned out two critical measures to reduce and detect the potential threat of common method bias. First, this study used anonymous questionnaires for our respondents in order to substantially prevent their suspicion or hesitation to factually fill out our questionnaires. Respondents were assured of complete anonymity in the cover letter, confirming that neither their personal names nor the names of their universities would be disclosed. Second, Harman's single factor test was performed (Podsakoff and Organ 1986), confirming that no single factor accounting for a majority of the variances was found. Based on the above two measures, common method bias is unlikely a threat in our data sample.

### Data Analysis

The actual survey data were analyzed with a two-step structural equation modeling (SEM). Whereas confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in the first step was performed to evaluate scale reliability and test validity, the structural model in the second step was used for testing our hypotheses. Empirical results from the two steps are presented respectively next.

In the CFA analysis, the goodness-of-fit of our model was evaluated with a variety of fit metrics as shown in Table 1. The figures of CFI, NFI, and NNFI were all larger than or equal to 0.9, while the figure of GFI is slightly lower than 0.9. The normalized chi-square (chi-square/degrees of freedom) of the CFA model was smaller than the recommended value of 3.0, the RMR was smaller than 0.05, and the RMSEA was smaller than 0.08. Collectively,



**Table 1** Standardized loadings and reliabilities

| Construct                           | Indicators | Standardized loading | Ave. | Cronbach's $\alpha$ |
|-------------------------------------|------------|----------------------|------|---------------------|
| Firm's attractiveness               | FA1        | 0.80 ( $t = 22.38$ ) | 0.61 | 0.82                |
|                                     | FA2        | 0.78 ( $t = 21.70$ ) |      |                     |
|                                     | FA3        | 0.77 ( $t = 21.39$ ) |      |                     |
| Career success expectation          | CS1        | 0.74 ( $t = 20.34$ ) | 0.64 | 0.84                |
|                                     | CS2        | 0.89 ( $t = 25.76$ ) |      |                     |
|                                     | CS3        | 0.78 ( $t = 21.72$ ) |      |                     |
| Perceived economic citizenship      | ET1        | 0.79 ( $t = 22.69$ ) | 0.56 | 0.86                |
|                                     | ET2        | 0.80 ( $t = 23.11$ ) |      |                     |
|                                     | ET3        | 0.76 ( $t = 21.84$ ) |      |                     |
|                                     | ET4        | 0.60 ( $t = 15.85$ ) |      |                     |
|                                     | ET5        | 0.79 ( $t = 23.02$ ) |      |                     |
| Perceived legal citizenship         | PH1        | 0.78 ( $t = 23.07$ ) | 0.65 | 0.90                |
|                                     | PH2        | 0.79 ( $t = 23.11$ ) |      |                     |
|                                     | PH3        | 0.83 ( $t = 24.94$ ) |      |                     |
|                                     | PH4        | 0.88 ( $t = 27.30$ ) |      |                     |
|                                     | PH5        | 0.77 ( $t = 22.18$ ) |      |                     |
| Perceived ethical citizenship       | EC1        | 0.78 ( $t = 22.70$ ) | 0.61 | 0.89                |
|                                     | EC2        | 0.78 ( $t = 22.62$ ) |      |                     |
|                                     | EC3        | 0.80 ( $t = 23.45$ ) |      |                     |
|                                     | EC4        | 0.80 ( $t = 23.27$ ) |      |                     |
|                                     | EC5        | 0.78 ( $t = 22.29$ ) |      |                     |
| Perceived philanthropic citizenship | LE1        | 0.83 ( $t = 24.86$ ) | 0.66 | 0.90                |
|                                     | LE2        | 0.82 ( $t = 24.30$ ) |      |                     |
|                                     | LE3        | 0.86 ( $t = 26.18$ ) |      |                     |
|                                     | LE4        | 0.83 ( $t = 24.92$ ) |      |                     |
|                                     | LE5        | 0.74 ( $t = 21.06$ ) |      |                     |

Goodness-of-fit indices  
 ( $N = 627$ ):  $\chi^2_{284} = 751.10$   
 ( $P$  value  $< 0.001$ );  
 NNFI = 0.95; NFI = 0.93;  
 CFI = 0.95; GFI = 0.91;  
 RMR = 0.02; RMSEA = 0.05

these figures suggest that the proposed model of this study fits the collected data well.

Convergent validity was examined based on three criteria (Fornell and Larcker 1981). First, all factor loadings in Table 1 were significant at  $P < 0.001$ , which confirms the convergent validity of our research constructs. Second, Cronbach's alphas of the constructs were all larger than 0.70 (see Table 1), supporting the criteria of reliability for research instruments. Third, the average variance extracted (AVE) for all the constructs exceeded 0.50, presenting that the overall measurement items capture substantial variance in the underlying construct than that attributable to measurement error (Fornell and Larcker 1981). All in all, the empirical data collected by this study met all three criteria required to assure convergent validity (Fornell and Larcker 1981).

This study used chi-square difference tests for assessing discriminant validity. By controlling for the experiment-wise error rate at the overall significance level of 0.01, the Bonferroni method showed that the critical value of the chi-square difference should be 12.74. Since chi-square difference statistics for all pairs of constructs in Table 2

exceeded this critical value of 12.74, discriminant validity of the empirical data in this study is confirmed.

### Structural Model

Based on the above CFA model, this study performed structural model testing that reflects the hypothesized relationships of this study. Figure 2 presents the test results of this analysis.

The test results show that six out of our eight model paths are empirically supported. More specifically, while a firm's attractiveness is positively influenced by all four dimensions of corporate citizenship (H3 is fully supported), career success expectation is positively influenced only by two dimensions of corporate citizenship, including perceived economic citizenship and legal citizenship (thus, H4 is partially supported).

The empirical results for two unsupported model paths are surprising and may suggest that not all the elements of corporate citizenship can equally influence firms' attractiveness and career success expectation. Such a phenomenon suggests that different dimensions of corporate

**Table 2** Chi-square difference tests for examining discriminate validity

| Construct pair | $\chi^2_{284} = 751.10$ (Unconstrained model) |                     |
|----------------|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------|
|                | $\chi^2_{284}$ (Constrained model)            | $\chi^2$ difference |
| (F1, F2)       | 1303.57***                                    | 552.47              |
| (F1, F3)       | 1080.98***                                    | 329.88              |
| (F1, F4)       | 1191.37***                                    | 440.27              |
| (F1, F5)       | 1064.56***                                    | 313.46              |
| (F1, F6)       | 1148.61***                                    | 397.51              |
| (F2, F3)       | 1327.09***                                    | 575.99              |
| (F2, F4)       | 1419.46***                                    | 668.36              |
| (F2, F5)       | 1459.01***                                    | 707.91              |
| (F2, F6)       | 1419.03***                                    | 667.93              |
| (F3, F4)       | 1436.72***                                    | 685.62              |
| (F3, F5)       | 1376.36***                                    | 625.26              |
| (F3, F6)       | 1147.61***                                    | 396.51              |
| (F4, F5)       | 1769.00***                                    | 1017.90             |
| (F4, F6)       | 1874.93***                                    | 1123.83             |
| (F5, F6)       | 1774.58***                                    | 1023.48             |

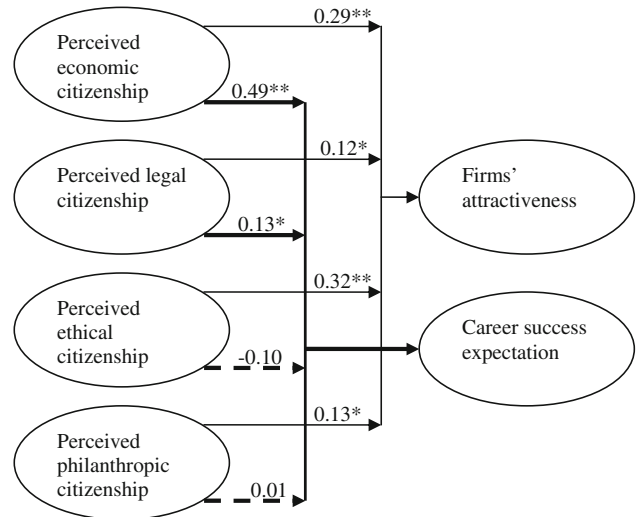
\*\*\* Significant at the 0.001 overall significance level by using the Bonferroni method

F1 Firm’s attractiveness, F2 career success expectation, F3 perceived economic citizenship, F4 perceived legal citizenship, F5 perceived ethical citizenship, F6 perceived philanthropic citizenship

citizenship have different weights and meanings to potential job seekers. Particularly, the insignificant effects of perceived ethical citizenship and perceived philanthropic citizenship on career success expectation suggest that such expectation is only driven by extrinsic factors (i.e., economic and legal citizenship). By contrary, perceived ethical and philanthropic citizenship having only direct effects on a firm’s attractiveness rather than career success expectation suggest that these two kinds of corporate citizenship are unlikely to be associated with monetary compensation or office authority (i.e., career elements). Nevertheless, the unexpected results for the two insignificant model paths warrant further study, so that the real causes behind the unsupported relationships between research constructs are not misinterpreted.

**Discussion**

This study is a pioneer to examine how different dimensions of corporate citizenship generate direct effects on a firm’s attractiveness. This study is an important complementary research for previous literature by empirically clarifying such direct effects to support our hypotheses. Additionally, this study establishes a critical bridge between corporate



**Fig. 2** Empirical results. Control variables: Gender, age. \* $P < 0.05$ ; \*\* $P < 0.01$

citizenship and career success expectation, while many previous studies often link corporate citizenship to its extrinsic outcomes such as profits or financial performance (e.g., Becker-Olsen et al. 2006) without taking people’s career expectation into consideration.

This study suggests a dual-track approach to gather potential job seekers’ applications by simultaneously signaling a firm’s features (e.g., establishing attractive corporate image) and exhibiting expected career scenarios (e.g., praising and rewarding the employee of the year). In a global economy where obtaining highly quality employees continues to become critical to a firm’s competitive advantages, the implication of these findings is significant. Most job seekers are affected not only by a firm’s attractiveness, but also their own career success expectation in the firm, and the latter factor is not discussed in any previous research. It would be a mistake to think of a firm’s attractiveness as the only factor that influences job seekers. While a firm communicates with potential job seekers by showing its corporate citizenship history during its recruitment activities, such activities may become less effective if it fails to weave visions directly linked to the job seekers’ future career.

Both firms’ attractiveness and career success expectation in this study are directly affected by perceived economic and legal citizenship, suggesting that these two kinds of corporate citizenship are the most powerful factors to affect people’s perception about particular job providers. Thus, management should always keep an eye on organizational changes related to such citizenship (e.g., new training programs, or new laws for business operations). Future internal customers (i.e., potential employees in the future) can be convinced to apply for a job when the firm

provides, for example, complete career planning for them. The key role of perceived economic and legal citizenship is theoretically and practically justifiable, because job seekers' impression about a particular firm will be unlikely improved if they sense poor economic and legal conditions in the workplace of the firm (e.g., King and Bu 2005). Managers should promote business codes based on law or beyond it to clarify any confusion during recruitment activities so as to avoid job seekers misunderstanding the firm's legal citizenship issues. Management should be determined to eliminate illegal opportunistic behavior that hazards business legitimacy (Lin 2010), because such behavior actually results in a lack of confidence among potential job seekers and weakens the firm's attractiveness and career success expectation. Future actions or plans that could continuously improve economic and legal citizenship should be always embedded as a part of the firm's business strategies (e.g., quality pension plans for employees).

Ethical and philanthropic citizenship, having significant effects only on a firm's attractiveness instead of career success expectation, suggest that these two intrinsic factors with nonutilitarian traits are unlikely linked to individuals' career success. Indeed, good ethical and philanthropic citizenship do not count heavily on detailed planning, but rather on long-term accumulative actions that are often not noticed by others in the first place. Such a phenomenon implies that business companies in general cannot easily hurdle the threshold of good ethical and philanthropic citizenship. In other words, those firms that can manage these two kinds of citizenship will have a better chance to strengthen their firm's attractiveness in large.

In summary, the findings of this study show that a firm's attractiveness and career success expectation are directly improved by strengthened corporate citizenship, suggesting that striving for corporate citizenship is of great worth to a firm. Superior job seekers cannot be easily convinced or attracted to apply for a job purely by immediate recruitment activities, but rather they can be well attracted by a firm after they clearly understand the firm's social actions from different social performance perspectives. The viewpoint of multiple social performance influencers (i.e., four dimensions of corporate citizenship) is quite different from that of the traditional literature solely focusing on firm structures or rewards (e.g., payrolls) in affecting the decision of people's job pursuit. The given definitions of the four dimensions of corporate citizenship are closely interrelated with the different concepts and values of potential employees hired by the firm in the future (Turker 2009). By understanding the dimensions in depth, management can learn to tailor a variety of firm policies to job seekers' interests in order to jointly encouraging more people to apply for the job.

## Limitations of the Study

This study contains two noticeable limitations associated with the interpretations of the empirical results. The first limitation is its generalizability, because of the highly delimited nature of the subject sample across universities in a single country setting (i.e., Taiwan). The inferences drawn from such a sample may not be completely generalizable to graduating MBA graduates from different countries with quite different national cultures. Second, because of the research scope that focuses on perceived corporate citizenship across potential job seekers, this study did not address institutional variables, such as firm ownership, firm structure, firm profitability, and stock prices, etc. Future scholars may try to improve these shortcomings by including more control variables, surveying more samples across various countries, and observing research subjects several times over a few months or reasons so that the genuine influences of perceived corporate citizenship on a firm's attractiveness and career success expectation can be longitudinally examined. In addition to the outcomes of this study, some other outcomes such as future job attachment, organizational citizenship behavior, and identification may be included and tested in future studies (e.g., Lin 2010). The findings herein provide an extraordinary contribution by showing a new direction that future research can take by continually searching for more potential antecedents (e.g., self-esteem) of a firm's attractiveness and career success expectation in order to better understand the formation of such attractiveness and expectation.

## Appendix A: Measurement Items

### *Firm's attractiveness* (Source: Bhattacharya and Sen 2003)

- FA1. I like what this firm stands for.
- FA2. The firm has an attractive identity.
- FA3. For me, this firm is a good organization to work for.

### *Career success expectation* (Source: Seibert et al. 2001)

- CS1. I expect the likelihood of my promotion is high if I work in the firm.
- CS2. I expect my salary is good if I work in the firm.
- CS3. I expect my career development can be successful if I work in the firm.

### *Perceived economic citizenship* (Source: Lin 2010)

- EC1. This firm supports employees who want to acquire additional education.
- EC2. This firm provides a good work environment and life quality for employees.



EC3. This firm provides important job training for employees.

EC4. This firm provides a quality and safe working environment for employees.

EC5: This firm encourages the employees to develop their skills continually.

#### *Perceived legal citizenship* (Source: Lin 2010)

LE1. The managers of this firm comply with the law.

LE2. This firm follows the law to prevent discrimination in workplaces.

LE3. This firm always fulfills its obligations of contracts.

LE4. This firm always seeks to respect all laws regulating its activities.

LE5: This firm always pays its taxes on a regular and continuing basis.

#### *Perceived ethical citizenship* (Source: Lin 2010)

ET1. This firm has a comprehensive code of conduct in ethics.

ET2. Fairness toward co-workers and business partners is an integral part of the employee evaluation process in this firm.

ET3. This firm provides accurate information to its business partners.

ET4. This firm is recognized as a company with good business ethics.

ET5. A confidential procedure is in place in the firm for employees to report any misconduct at work.

#### *Perceived philanthropic citizenship* (Source: Lin 2010)

PH1. This firm gives adequate contributions to charities.

PH2. This firm sponsors partnerships with local schools or institutions.

PH3. This firm is concerned about respecting and protecting the natural environment.

PH4. This firm is concerned about the improvement of the public well-being of society.

PH5: This firm encourages its employees to participate in volunteer activities.

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