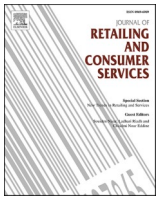
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# How do online sales channels affect global product purchases? The role of CSR and cross-country differences

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to extend the link between online purchasability and consumers' actual purchase behavior in the global product context by considering global companies' social contributions and cross-country differences. Using 1033 datasets from South Korea (n = 545) and Japan (n = 488), we employed the PROCESS macro to test the moderated moderated mediation hypothesis. Our findings highlight that global companies' social contributions strengthen the positive indirect effect of online purchasability on purchase frequency by increasing the number of items purchased. Furthermore, contrary to our prediction, Japanese consumers with a high evaluation of social contribution have a stronger positive indirect link between online purchasability and purchase frequency than South Korean consumers. We provide significant insights into the implications of online sales channel management and its strategy, highlighting the role of corporate social responsibility in better understanding the dynamics of global consumer product purchases in the context of a cross-country analysis.

## 1. Introduction

Globalization enables people to engage with foreign cultures and easily access various global products (Velocity Global, 2023). In 2022, the value of globally exported goods reached approximately $24.9 trillion, marking an almost fourfold increase compared to two decades ago (Statista, 2023a). These social and economic changes highlight the need to develop sales channels for global products, ensuring sustainable growth for international corporations. However, beyond product-oriented barriers such as additional costs (Huang and Chang, 2019), challenges persist as some consumers resist buying foreign goods due to differences in national and cultural dimensions, such as cultural identities (Zhang and Khare, 2009), perceived psychosocial distance (Yu et al., 2022), and country-of-origin (Ortega-Egea and García de Frutos, 2021), presenting obstacles for global businesses. Similarly, according to Statista (2023b), consumer evaluations of global products compared to local products vary by country, demonstrating that the acceptance of global products can differ across nations. Therefore, to cultivate consumers' willingness to purchase global goods, it is essential for global companies to adopt integrated approaches that consider sales channel strategies and marketing signals to reduce consumers' purchasing barriers beyond the product itself. This approach should particularly account for cross-country differences.

To address these challenges, we primarily emphasize the role of online sales channels in increasing consumer receptiveness toward global products. For instance, PayPal revealed that 72% of consumers cite better prices as the primary reason for purchasing global products through e-commerce platforms and 49% do so for access to merchandise that is unavailable in their country (International Trade Administration, 2023). Early investigators also found that online sales channels are more effective in familiarizing consumers with global products by providing convenient access to pricing and product information, locating niche items that are not readily available offline, and offering a diverse range of products from various countries (Chu et al., 2010; Kushwaha and

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Shankar, 2013; Velocity Global, 2023).

However, our insights into online sales channel strategies regarding ongoing purchases of global products remain obscure. With the increasing demand for niche and diverse products from abroad through online channel shopping (China Daily, 2023; Huang and Chang, 2019; Kim et al., 2022), global companies must understand how the perceived usefulness or attractiveness of online sales channels influences continuous purchases by online shoppers. Additionally, clarifying the influential cues or signals from shoppers' purchases that either amplify or mitigate this relationship is crucial for providing a more comprehensive framework explaining online shopping behaviors, which is often overlooked in the e-commerce literature.

Therefore, we address three significant limitations of prior study. First, prior studies have primarily measured online purchasing habits through consumers' subjective perceptions or assessments such as attitude (Al-Debei et al., 2015), purchase intention (Chen and Yang, 2021), and repurchase intention (Al-Adwan et al., 2022). However, as Pare and Pourazad (2017) noted, exploring shopping behavior using action-based indicators such as frequency, quantity, time, and money spent offers an opportunity to understand segmented consumer behavior in the shopping process and develop practical tactics to convert foot traffic into actual purchases. Despite these insights, shared knowledge with more objective indicators on how online sales channel strategies influence actual purchasing behavior is lacking (Verstraeten et al., 2023).

Second, consumers may feel less familiar with global products, especially in online shopping environments with limited information on sellers and products (Schlosser et al., 2006). This can be mitigated by providing explicit cues or signals during the consumption process that provide credible seller and product information (Meents and Verhagen, 2018). We argue that corporate social responsibility (CSR), which extends beyond profit to benefit society, can serve as a significant indicator of sustained consumer purchases. While some scholars highlight CSR's role in reducing purchase risk and improving corporate reputation and customer loyalty (Bhattacharya et al., 2021; Cao et al., 2024), they focus primarily on contexts outside online sales channels. Although CSR efforts are crucial for differentiating global companies by reinforcing consumers' identification with and loyalty to the company (Crespo and Inacio, 2019), research on e-retailing often examines the impact of explicit cues, such as product reviews and sales policies, on consumer decision-making (Bhattacharya et al., 2023; Shao et al., 2021). These studies generally overlook the influence of companies' social contributions, conveyed through marketing signals, on consumers' purchasing behaviors.

Third, given the varying levels of digital penetration across countries, which influence consumer engagement with global products, it is essential to explore cross-country differences. South Korea and Japan, as prominent examples of Asian nations, exhibit markedly different consumer consumption patterns and behaviors despite their geographical proximity. According to Invest KOREA (2023), South Korea leads in information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure, household Internet access, and social media usage, whereas Japan does not rank within the top 10 in these areas. This disparity indicates that the availability and consumer interaction with global products may be influenced by the maturity of a country's digital infrastructure and its reliance on online shopping. Furthermore, the effectiveness and interpretation of various marketing signals in online environments may vary depending on cross-country differences (Kao et al., 2021). Specifically, marketing practices related to CSR, which are the focus of our study, demonstrate notable variations in consumer expectations and reactions depending on cultural contexts (Kim and Kinoshita, 2023; Santoro et al., 2020). However, research addressing these dynamics in the context of cross-country analyses is limited.

Against this backdrop, this study empirically investigates how online sales channels affect consumers' actual purchasing behavior toward global products, by considering firms' social contributions and cross-country differences. This study makes three significant contributions to the literature. First, we examined the action-based mechanism that explains the linkage between online purchasability and purchase frequency by considering the number of global products purchased as a mediator. Drawing on the expectation–confirmation model (Bhattacherjee, 2001), we provide initial insights into the causal relationship between online purchasability (i.e., the perceived usefulness of online sales channels), number of global products purchased (i.e., a tangible indicator of consumer satisfaction), and purchase frequency of global products (i.e., continued usage behaviors) in the online shopping context.

Second, this study is novel in that it tests the moderated mediating effect of global companies' social contributions on the indirect effect of online purchasability on purchase frequency. Based on the principles of signaling theory, which elucidates the influence of marketing-related activities on consumers amidst information asymmetry (Mishra et al., 1998), this study highlights the role of global companies' CSR activities as potential external signals influencing consumers' online purchases of global products.

Third, this study advances the understanding of cross-country differences in consumers' online purchasing habits by examining two Asian countries: South Korea (n = 545) and Japan (n = 488). Despite their geographical proximity, these nations exhibit significant disparities in their adoption and engagement with online shopping for everyday products. Additionally, differences in interest and participation in social and political issues between two countries may affect the effectiveness of CSR campaigns in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviors toward specific firms or products (Kim and Kinoshita, 2023; Kong and Ko, 2017). This study aims to explore the combined effect of online purchasability and social contribution on consumers' actual purchasing behavior towards global products—an area that has not been previously investigated in a country-specific context.

## 2. Background research and conceptual framework

### 2.1. Online sales channels in consumer purchasing behaviors

Online sales channels refer to "internet-enabled devices (for example, mobile devices) that consumers can use to interact with and purchase products from an online retailer" (Wagner et al., 2020, p. 257). These online sales channels offer significant benefits to consumers, such as convenience (Duarte et al., 2018), price benefits (Kim et al., 2023), information availability (To et al., 2007), ease of shopping (Do et al., 2023), and product benefits (Kim et al., 2023). Moreover, considering the changes in consumer lifestyles owing to environmental disruptions, such as social distancing during COVID-19 (Higueras-Castillo et al., 2023) and unpredictable customer boycotts (Kim et al., 2022), the unprecedented emergence of omni-channels (Cai and Choi, 2023; Frasquet et al., 2024) and cross-border e-commerce (Elia et al., 2021) will steadily accelerate the positive usage of these online sales channels.

However, despite the benefits and environmental disruptions, not all consumers favor purchasing goods and services online because of perceived risks (Kamalul Ariffin et al., 2018; Liao et al., 2021) and consumer privacy concerns (Bhattacharya et al., 2023). This is why online business companies have faced managerial challenges of whether and how they can create favorable purchasing environments for consumers through online sales channels in terms of channel novelty (Frasquet et al., 2024), customer experience (Chen and Yang, 2021), branding (González-Benito et al., 2015), and trust (Al-Adwan et al., 2022; Toufaily et al., 2013). Consequently, to offer valuable insights on this managerial challenges, early investigators have largely focused on salient characteristics and diverse aspects of online sales channels in better predicting consumers' online shopping behaviors.

Table 1 provides a comprehensive summary of past studies examining the relationship between online sales channels and consumer purchase behaviors. Specifically, prior research has consistently demonstrated that the perceived usefulness or attractiveness of online

**Table 1**
Key empirical studies on online sales channels and consumer purchase behavior.

| Study | Study context | Theoretical perspective | Online aspects | Explanatory mechanism(s) | | Outcome Variables | Key findings related to the present study |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Moderator | Mediator | | |
| Shin et al. (2013) | A survey of 230 university students regarding internet shopping in Korea | N/A | Internet site quality[a] | N/T | Customer trust; Customer satisfaction; Customer commitment | Repurchase intention | • The indirect positive effect of site quality on customer repurchase intention through customer satisfaction, customer trust, and customer commitment was supported.<br>• The indirect positive effect of customer satisfaction on repurchase intention through customer trust and customer commitment was supported. |
| Toufaily et al. (2013) | A survey of 989 customers regarding website retailers in France | N/A | e-trust of retail website | Retailer presence (pure-click vs. click-and-brick) | Website attitude | WOM | • The direct effect of e-trust on website attitude and the indirect effect on WOM were supported.<br>• The retailer presence (pure-click vs. click-and-brick) moderates the relationship between social presence and online benevolence. |
| Al-Debei et al. (2015). | A survey of 273 online shoppers in Jordan | N/A | Perceived benefits; eWOM; Perceived web quality | N/T | Trust | Attitude toward online shopping | • The direct effect of perceived web quality on perceived benefits, e-WOM, and trust was supported.<br>• The direct effect of perceived benefits and trust on attitudes toward online shopping was supported. |
| Kamalul Ariffin et al. (2018) | A survey of 350 shoppers in Malaysia | N/A | Perceived risks | N/T | N/T | Online purchase intention | • The direct negative effect of financial, product, security, time, social, and psychological risks on online purchase intention were supported. |
| Duarte et al. (2018) | A survey of 250 online customers in Portugal | N/A | Online shopping convenience[b] | N/T | Online convenience; Online customer satisfaction | Shopping intention; e -WOM | • The direct positive effect of online shopping convenience on online convenience was supported which in turn led to online customer satisfaction.<br>• The direct positive effect of online customer satisfaction on shopping intention and e-WOM was supported. |
| Chen and Yang (2021) | A survey of 321 cross-border online shoppers in China | Social network theory | Online customer experience[c] | N/T | Network density; Network centrality | Purchase intention | • The direct effect of customer experience in terms of website ease of use, website relationship service, and customer cost on purchase intention was supported.<br>• The indirect effect of customer experience on purchase intention through network density and network centrality was supported. |
| Indiani and Febriandari (2021) | A survey of 450 consumers in Indonesia | Theory of planned behavior; Perceived risk theory | Perceived benefits; Perceived risk | N/T | Online purchase intention | Actual purchase | • The direct effect of perceived benefits on online purchase intention and actual purchase was supported.<br>• The direct effect of perceived risk on online purchase intention and actual purchase was not supported. |
| Liao et al. (2021) | A survey of 509 online shoppers in Taiwan | N/A | Perceived risk | Online involvement | e-WOM | Online purchase intention | • The direct effect of perceived risk on e-WOM |

(*continued on next page*)

**Table 1** (*continued*)

| Study | Study context | Theoretical perspective | Online aspects | Explanatory mechanism(s) | | Outcome Variables | Key findings related to the present study |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Moderator | Mediator | | |
| | | | | | | | and online purchase intention was supported.<br>• The indirect effect of perceived risk on online purchase intention e-WOM was supported.<br>• The online involvement has moderated the indirect relationship between perceived risk and online purchase intention via e-WOM. |
| Shao et al. (2021) | A survey of 425 online shoppers in China | Signaling theory; Cue utilization theory; Halo effect theory | e-tailers return policy | Product traceability code; Port of shipment | Perceived quality; Perceived risk | Purchase intention | • The direct positive effects of online retailers' lenient return policy on perceived quality and negative effect of perceived risk were supported, which led to purchase intention.<br>• The moderating effects of port of shipment and product traceability code of online retailers' lenient return policy on perceived quality and perceived risk was supported. |
| Al-Adwan et al. (2022) | A survey of 560 online customers in Jordan | Stimulus-response-organism theory; Information processing theory | E-commerce policy service quality[d]; E-commerce logistic service quality[e] | N/T | Customer trust; Customer satisfaction | Repurchase intention; WOM intention | • The direct positive effect of customer satisfaction on customer trust, WOM intention, and repurchase intention was supported.<br>• The direct positive effect of customer trust on repurchase intention was supported whereas the WOM was not supported. |
| Bhattacharya et al. (2023) | A survey of 355 customers in India | Psychological distance theory; Signaling theory | e-retailers' country-of-origin | N/T | Consumer privacy; Trust | Purchase intention | • Direct positive effect of country of origin on consumer privacy, trust, and purchase intention was supported.<br>• Direct positive effect of trust on purchase intention was supported. |
| Verstraeten et al. (2023) | A database study of 4000 customers and 2 laboratory experiments (n = 79, n = 98) in Belgium | Cue Utilization theory | Shopping channel effect (shopping online vs. offline) | N/T | Relying on external product cue heuristics; Perceived quality gap between PL and NB | Percentage of PL food products in basket | • Customers buy more PL food products in terms of quantity and value online than offline.<br>• The direct effect of external product cue heuristics on quality gap between PL and NB was supported.<br>• The serial mediation of external product cue heuristics and quality gap was supported between the relationship of shopping channel and percentage of PL food products in baskets. |
| Xie et al. (2023) | A survey of 401 customers in China | Stimulus-response-organism theory | Integrated return fulfilment; Integrated customer service | Offline store convenience; Product variety in the offline store | Customer satisfaction | Online behavioral intentions | • The direct effects of integrated return fulfilment and customer service on customer satisfaction were supported, indicating online purchase intentions.<br>• The offline store convenience moderated the relationship between integrated return fulfilment and customer service on customer satisfaction. |
| Frasquet et al. (2024) | A survey of 453 shoppers in Spain | Novelty categorization | Online channel perceived novelty | N/T | Inspired-by online; Inspired-to online | Online channel loyalty | • The perceived novelty of the online channel increases consumers' |

(*continued on next page*)

**Table 1** (*continued*)

| Study | Study context | Theoretical perspective | Online aspects | Explanatory mechanism(s) | | Outcome Variables | Key findings related to the present study |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Moderator | Mediator | | |
| | | theory; Affect transfer theory | | | | | online channel loyalty through the inspired-by online and inspired-to online. |
| Hagen et al. (2024) | A survey of 442 Dutch consumers in Netherlands | Uses and gratification theory | Convenience-seeking; Entertainment-seeking; Reward-seeking | Gender; Age | Attitude toward browsing local online retail platforms | Online purchase intention | • The direct effects of convenience-seeking, entertainment-seeking, and reward-seeking on attitudes were supported to lead to online purchase intention.<br>• The gender moderated convenience seeking on attitude such as the relationship was stronger for women than men; however, the moderating effect for reward-seeking on attitude was significant for men only. |
| Li et al. (2024) | A survey of 7701 respondents in China | Social presence theory | Social presence of the streamer | Loneliness | Consumer experience; Loneliness | Purchase intention | • The direct effects of social presence on consumer experience, loneliness, and purchase intention were supported.<br>• Loneliness moderated the relationship between a streamer's social presence and consumer experience. |
| Taheri et al. (2024) | A survey of 819 customers in Iran | Stimulus-organism-response theory | Enablers of online channels[f] | N/T | Customer engagement; Trust toward the website | Customer loyalty; Satisfaction experience | • The main enablers, except performance expectation and social influence, were positively related to customer engagement and trust toward the online website, which increased customer loyalty and satisfaction. |
| The Present study | A survey of 488 Japanese and 545 South Korean consumers regarding global products. | Expectation confirmation model; Signaling theory | Online purchasability of global products | Social contribution of global companies | Number of global products purchased | Purchase frequency of global products | • Direct effect of online purchasability on the purchase frequency (ns) is positively mediated by the number of global products purchased.<br>• Social contribution strengthens the positive indirect effect of online purchasability on the purchase frequency.<br>• Compared to South Koreans, Japanese consumers with high social contribution are stronger for the positive indirect link of online purchasability on the purchase frequency. |

Note: We gathered target articles by searching the Web of Science and Google Scholar databases using the keywords "online sales", "online channel", "online shopping", and "consumer behavior" in the online channel shopping field titles. Finally, we selected 17 articles that are highly relevant to our research context by focusing on empirical studies that explicitly test the relationship between the salient characteristics of online sales channels and consumer shopping behavior; ns = non-significant relationship; N/T = not tested; N/A = not applicable.

[a] Internet site quality includes shopping convenience, site design, information usefulness, transaction security, payment system, and customer communication.

[b] Online shopping convenience includes access convenience, evaluation convenience, attentiveness convenience, transaction convenience, and possession and post-possession convenience.

[c] Customer experience includes website ease of use, website relationship service, and customer cost.

[d] E-commerce policy service quality includes cash-on-delivery options and return policy leniency.

[e] E-commerce logistics service quality includes timely product delivery, product availability, and shipment conditions.

[f] Online channel enablers include performance expectation, effort expectation, social influence, facilitating conditions, website vividness, and compulsion.

sales channels in terms of, for example, perceived benefit and web quality (Al-Debei et al., 2015), online shopping convenience (Duarte et al., 2018; Hagen et al., 2024), e-commerce policy and logistic service quality (Al-Adwan et al., 2022), e-tailer return policies (Shao et al., 2021), integrated return fulfillment, customer services (Xie et al., 2023), and online channel novelty (Frasquet et al., 2024) enhance consumer attitudes toward online shopping (Al-Debei et al., 2015), experience satisfaction (Taheri et al., 2024), purchase intention (Chen and Yang,

2021; Li et al., 2024), repurchase intention (Shin et al., 2013), and even actual purchase behavior (Indiani and Febriandari, 2021; Verstraeten et al., 2023).

Additionally, the studies in Table 1 extend the link between online sales channels and consumer purchase behaviors by conceptualizing diverse explanatory mechanisms as mediating and moderating variables. Specifically, while mediating variables are considered as customer trust, satisfaction, and commitment (Shin et al., 2013), online convenience (Duarte et al., 2018), electronic word of mouth (e-WOM; Liao et al., 2021), consumer privacy (Bhattacharya et al., 2023), customer engagement (Taheri et al., 2024), attitude toward retail platforms (Hagen et al., 2024), and customer inspiration (Frasquet et al., 2024), these studies examined moderating effects of retailer presence of pure-click vs. click-and-brick (Toufaily et al., 2013), online involvement (Liao et al., 2021), offline store convenience (Xie et al., 2023), gender (Hagen et al., 2024), loneliness (Li et al., 2024), and product traceability code and port of shipment (Shao et al., 2021).

While previous research has provided valuable insights into online sales channels and their effects on consumer responses, there is a significant gap in the literature on the connection between CSR activities and the impact of these online sales channels. Specifically, there is a lack of studies examining whether and how global companies' CSR initiatives affect the effectiveness of online sales channels. Furthermore, research on cross-cultural similarities and differences in consumer responses to online sales channels across countries is limited. Addressing these gaps in literature is crucial. Understanding the relationship between CSR activities and online sales channel effectiveness can provide valuable insights for global companies seeking to enhance their online strategies. Additionally, exploring cross-cultural variations in the impact of online sales channels can help tailor strategies to diverse markets and ultimately improve international marketing effectiveness.

### 2.2. Theory and conceptual framework

To address this gap, this study advances our understanding of the relationship between online purchasability and actual purchase behavior (i.e., our baseline argument) by applying an expectation-confirmation model and signaling theory. First, the expectation-confirmation model (ECM), developed by Bhattacherjee in 2001, explains the reasons for an individual's continued use of information technology (IT) products or services. This model emphasizes the role of perceived usefulness, which evolves as users interact with technology and gather more information. By focusing on perceived usefulness and user satisfaction, the ECM has been successful in determining IT continuance-intentions. This model has been applied in various fields, including e-commerce (Kim et al., 2022; Yao and Li, 2024) and mobile services (Wu et al., 2022), demonstrating its effectiveness in understanding behaviors related to continued use of technology.

Signaling theory explains how individuals, organizations, or entities convey information to mitigate uncertainty in situations marked by information asymmetry (Connelly et al., 2011). The theory is rooted in two main premises: first, information imbalances between two parties (i.e., the signal receiver and sender), where one party holds superior or more comprehensive information, create a knowledge gap, and second, signals—observable actions, attributes, or behaviors by the signaler—are employed to bridge this gap, offering insights into the signaler's otherwise obscure qualities or characteristics. The efficacy of signals is heightened when they are costly to emulate or difficult to falsify, thus ensuring reliable communication of the intended information (Lee, 2001). This theory has been applied to diverse fields including strategic management (Su et al., 2016; Zhong et al., 2022), human resource management (Guest et al., 2021; Lee, 2001), and marketing (Kharouf et al., 2020), demonstrating its versatility and breadth of relevance.

Fig. 1 summarizes our arguments in the context of global product purchases: 1) the number of global products purchased can serve a mediating role in the link between online purchasability and purchase frequency; 2) the indirect effect of online purchasability on purchase frequency is contingent on the social contribution of global companies; and 3) the moderated mediating effect of social contribution varies depending on the country-specific context.

Specifically, we draw on the ECM to analyze the causal relationships among online purchasability, the number of global products purchased, and purchase frequency. The online purchasability of global products, defined as the ease and convenience with which consumers can acquire global products through online sales platforms (Kim et al., 2022), is a crucial aspect of perceived usefulness, reflecting the expected benefits of IT use. The number of global products purchased indicates a tangible measure of consumer satisfaction, whereas the purchase frequency of global products is consistent with post-expectation adjustments and continuance intentions. In the global market, consumers encounter a wide range of products and services online, necessitating a theoretical framework that can accommodate the varied expectations and satisfaction levels influenced by cultural, economic, and technological factors. The ECM's emphasis on perceived usefulness and user satisfaction aligns well with the online shopping experience, where consumers evaluate the efficiency and convenience of acquiring products from global vendors. Additionally, the ECM's ability to explain continuance intentions provide a theoretical lens for understanding the factors increasing the purchase frequency of global products in this study. Compared to other consumer behavior theories that highlight initial adoption or temporary behavioral intentions, the ECM provides a structured framework to analyze how initial interactions and satisfaction with online channels lead to repeated usage intentions in the context of long-term exchange relationships (Bhattacherjee, 2021; Wu et al., 2022). Furthermore, a growing number of empirical studies have demonstrated significant achievements in understanding continuance intention in the e-commerce context using the ECM (Kim et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2022; Yao and Li, 2024). Specifically, Kim et al. (2022) examined the role of online purchasability in e-commerce by using the ECM to investigate consumers' actual purchase behavior towards global

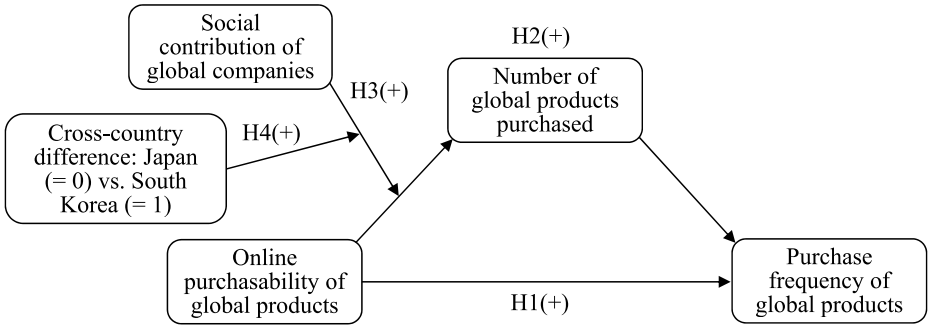



**Fig. 1.** Conceptual framework.
Note: H1, H2, H3, and H4 represent the direct, indirect, moderated mediation, and moderated moderated mediation effects, respectively.

companies.

To better understand the impact of global companies' social contributions on consumer evaluations of their products, we applied signaling theory to this study. Global companies' social contribution refers to their efforts and commitment to improving society in local markets (Liu et al., 2020). These contributions can act as crucial signals that shape consumers' perceptions of global products (Cowan and Guzman, 2020), especially in the online marketplace, where consumers often lack comprehensive information about companies and their products because of challenges in evaluating product authenticity and quality from physical and psychological perspectives. Studies on CSR activities (Kim and Kinoshita, 2023; Su et al., 2016; Zhong et al., 2022) show that companies' social contributions are regarded as important signals mitigating consumer uncertainty when information about global companies and their products is inadequate. Thus, signaling theory is well-suited to the context of this study because it provides a framework for understanding how social contributions indicate product quality and company reliability when consumers may lack sufficient information. This subsequently influences the effect of online purchasability on the number of global products purchased.

Furthermore, drawing on signaling theory, this study analyzes cross-country differences in consumers' online purchasing habits between South Korea and Japan. Despite their similar cultural dimensions (Hofstede Insights, n.d.), South Korea and Japan have often been compared (Herrador et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2022; Kim and Kinoshita, 2023) because of their geographical proximity. However, there is a lack of research comparing their online consumption and CSR perspectives. This gap is crucial considering the growing importance of online channel shopping and role of CSR in influencing consumer behavior. Both countries display different levels of online consumption and engagement (ECDB, 2023a, 2023b) and CSR initiatives (Kong and Ko, 2017), leading to varied interpretations of global companies' social contributions. By examining these differences, we highlight that, in an online setting, the effectiveness and interpretation of social contributions as cues or signals concerning global companies and their products can vary significantly across country-specific contexts, such as cultural, economic, or regulatory frameworks specific to each country (Connelly et al., 2011; McNamara et al., 2008).

## 3. Hypotheses development

### 3.1. Direct effect of online purchasability on purchase frequency

According to ECM, an individual's continuance usage intentions are determined by perceived usefulness because it is the most salient cognitive belief regarding IT-related products or services (Bhattacherjee, 2001). Previous literature has also verified the direct effect of specific attributes of perceived usefulness (e.g., perceived time-saving and perceived promotion) on continuance intentions (Yao and Li, 2024). In the context of online channels, perceived usefulness can be considered along with other aspects of online sales channels, such as ease of use, convenience, accessibility, and efficiency, because these factors represent the utilitarian benefits that enhance the consumer's shopping experience. These benefits will ensure a smooth and reliable purchasing process, thereby increasing the likelihood of continued use. For example, as summarized in Table 1, prior research has demonstrated that various aspects of online sales channels, including internet site quality (Shin et al., 2013) and e-commerce logistic service quality (Al-Adwan et al., 2022), influence repurchase intention. These findings align with ECM's underlying assumption that perceived usefulness influences continuous usage intentions.

Based on this rationale, this study proposes a positive relationship between online purchasability and purchase frequency for global products. When consumers engage in online transactions for global products, their level of online purchasability becomes critical, as it represents the practical advantage of obtaining products through online sales channels. This significance is heightened considering that consumers may have limited information and experience with global products compared to domestic products. Drawing insights from ECM scholars (Bhattacherjee, 2001; Lee and Kwon, 2011), the perception of expected practical benefits toward online channels selling global products (i.e., online purchasability) is likely to influence consumers' continuance intentions. Moreover, this study reinterprets continuance intention within the ECM framework as the purchase frequency of global products, thereby extending the concept of continuance purchase behavior to include the average monthly frequency of buying global products online. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

**H1**. Online purchasability directly increases the purchase frequency of global products.

### 3.2. Mediating effect of the number of global products purchased

Within the ECM framework, user satisfaction is a central construct that mediates the relationship between perceived usefulness and continuance intention (Bhattacherjee, 2001). In this study, a higher number of global products purchased suggests sustained interest and positive confirmation of initial expectations, akin to the concept of user satisfaction, which is an ex-post evaluation following users' initial trial experiences (Bhattacherjee, 2001; Lee and Kwon, 2011). An expanding body of research seeks to extend the ECM further by introducing variables representing user satisfaction. These variables include habit (Chou et al., 2013), intimacy and familiarity (Lee and Kwon, 2011), and IT mindfulness (i.e., the dynamics of IT experience; Wu et al., 2022), which act as mediating variables between perceived usefulness and continuous usage intentions. The mediators identified in the previous findings, which indicate repeated actions based on satisfaction with online transactions, suggest that the number of global products purchased serves a similar mediating function.

We offer a further rationale for this mediating process. Numerous studies listed in Table 1 have identified various mediators connecting consumer perceptions to online purchase behavior. These include customer commitment (Shin et al., 2013), attitude (Al-Debei et al., 2015), and customer satisfaction (Al-Adwan et al., 2022; Duarte et al., 2018; Shin et al., 2013). Whether derived from cognitive or affective perspectives, these mediators collectively inform consumers of their holistic assessments of online purchase experiences. Consequently, the number of global products purchased, which serves as a tangible indicator of consumer assessment of the acceptance and confirmation of global products, can act as a mediator linking online purchasability to the frequency of purchasing online products. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

**H2**. Online purchasability indirectly increases the purchase frequency of global products by increasing the number of global products purchased.

### 3.3. Moderated mediation effect of social contribution

Building on the principles of signaling theory, this study suggests that the positive indirect effect of online purchasability on the purchase frequency of global products is enhanced by social contributions. Signaling theory asserts that in contexts characterized by information asymmetry, where a gap exists between what consumers know and what they need to know, signals act as crucial indicators that mitigate uncertainty and guide decision-making processes (Connelly et al., 2011). In the realm of online transactions for global products, where a direct assessment of product quality or authenticity is impractical, consumers depend heavily on such signals to assess the credibility and value of products and sellers. Previous research has highlighted the risk-mitigating effect of signals related to CSR, which reduce uncertainty and information voids about products or services (Bhattacharya et al., 2021; Cowan and Guzman, 2020; Guest et al., 2021; Kharouf et al.,

2020; Zhong et al., 2022). These studies describe this effect as a warm glow, wherein the act of supporting societal benefits motivates consumers to purchase goods or services from companies, regardless of other attributes such as quality or product performance (Bhattacharya et al., 2021).

Drawing from these insights, we argue that global companies' social contribution serves as a critical signal of CSR, signifying a company's dedication not only to profit but also to positively impact society. When an online sales channel exhibits a commitment to social causes—through socially and environmentally sustainable practices, charitable donations, or fair labor standards—it sends a potent message about the brand's values and reliability (Gürhan-Canli and Batra, 2004), which in turn motivates consumers toward purchase actions. Given this rationale, we assume that social contributions significantly affect the impact of online purchasability on the number of global products purchased. Specifically, this study hypothesizes a moderated mediation effect, wherein social contributions positively moderate the indirect effect of online purchasability on purchase frequency by acting as a robust signal that enhances consumer trust and certainty. Consequently, we propose the following hypothesis:

**H3**. Global companies' social contributions strengthen the positive indirect effect of online purchasability on the purchase frequency of global products.

### 3.4. Moderated moderated mediation effect of a cross-country difference

Signaling theory scholars have identified several factors that affect the interpretation of a signal, thereby influencing its effectiveness or strength. These factors include the signaling environment (Cowan and Guzman, 2020; Zhong et al., 2022), nature of the characteristic being signaled (i.e., signal frame; Kharouf et al., 2020), and characteristics of the receivers (Guest et al., 2021). As a signal often represents characteristics that are not directly observable (Su et al., 2016), the effectiveness and interpretation of the signal critically hinge on the receiver's capacity to discern the sender's underlying intentions or the context in which the signal is interpreted. Building on these insights, we posit that the moderated mediating effect of social contributions depicted in H3 is contingent on cross-country differences, specifically between South Korea and Japan.

While both countries share similar cultural characteristics, according to Hofstede's cultural dimensions framework (Hofstede, 1984)—including high power distance, a relatively collectivist culture, high uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation (Hofstede Insights, n. d.)—their online consumption and CSR initiatives differ. Consequently, social contributions as signals from global companies can be differently interpreted in these culturally similar but behaviorally distinct markets. Several factors contribute to these differences between South Korea and Japan. First, consumers' perceptions of and attitudes toward online differ significantly between South Korea and Japan. South Korean consumers exhibit high engagement with online purchasing, as evidenced by the retail sector's online share, accounting for approximately 23.9% of total sales in 2023 (ECDB, 2023a), compared to Japan's 12.4%, according to data from ECDB (ECDB, 2023b). This disparity suggests that South Korean consumers are not only comfortable with but also prefer online shopping as a primary mode of purchasing goods. Familiarity with and reliance on online sales channels for shopping may increase South Korean consumers' sensitivity to the online purchasability of global products, in contrast to Japanese consumers who exhibit a more cautious approach to online shopping.

Second, the recognition and reflection of CSR's importance vary between South Korea and Japan. South Korean consumers place high value on CSR and tend to evaluate products in terms of their CSR reputation (Kong and Ko, 2017), indicating a cultural and societal tendency to support companies that demonstrate commitment to social and environmental responsibilities. This is likely influenced by South Korea's broader culture of social activism, which is characterized by significant consumer advocacy for ethical and socially responsible business practices, including the #MeToo movement (Shin, 2021), candlelight protests (Hwang and Willis, 2020), and other boycott campaigns (Kim and Kinoshita, 2023). By contrast, Japan's civic engagement, while present, tends to manifest in more restrained and formal ways, partly because of cultural norms that prioritize harmony and order. Moreover, the effects of social contributions on behavioral intentions are more pronounced in South Korea than in Japan, which aligns with the findings of Kim and Kinoshita (2023). Given the observed differences in social activity and participation between South Korean and Japanese societies, South Korean consumers may place higher value on the social contributions of global companies than do Japanese consumers.

By integrating the dynamics of online sales platforms and CSR between the two countries, along with the contextual effect of the signaling environment, where the interpretation of the signal (i.e., social contribution) can differ based on the nature of the characteristic being signaled, this study assumes that the combined effect of online purchasability and social contribution on the number of global products purchased will vary depending on cross-country differences. Specifically, under circumstances in which the indirect effect of online purchasability on purchase frequency is stronger for consumers who evaluate social contributions from global companies highly, this moderated mediation effect of social contribution is further amplified for South Korean consumers than for Japanese consumers. Consequently, we propose the following hypotheses:

**H4**. Cross-country differences moderate the moderated mediation effect depicted in H3. Specifically, compared to Japanese (South Korean) consumers, South Korean (Japanese) consumers with a high evaluation of the social contribution of global companies are stronger (weaker) in terms of the positive indirect link between online purchasability and the purchase frequency of global products.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1. Research context and data collection

This study investigates consumers' buying behavior regarding global products in a multicultural setting. The survey targeted frequently purchased and low-priced fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) such as food, beverages, alcohol, cigarettes, makeup, sanitary products, cleaning supplies, and pharmaceuticals. By adopting a quota sampling technique based on gender and age in each country, we distributed a questionnaire survey through the online market research companies (i.e., Macromill Embrain in South Korea and Rakuten Insights in Japan) and finally obtained 545 South Korean and 488 Japanese consumers for the purpose of this study. From the Japanese data, we excluded 12 respondents offering incomplete answers regarding actual purchases of global products. The sample descriptions are listed in Table 2: gender ($male_{_South\ Korea} = 270$, $female_{_South\ Korea} = 275$; $male_{_Japan} = 247$, $female_{_Japan} = 241$) and age ($Mean_{_South\ Korea} = 35.36$, $SD_{_South\ Korea} = 14.05$; $Mean_{_Japan} = 41.01$, $SD_{_Japan} = 16.69$).

As such, we believe that examining consumer purchasing habits for global products in both countries is essential for achieving the objectives of this study. These product categories have become a vital part of daily life and consumers in South Korea and Japan can easily access and purchase them through online sales platforms. Numerous alternative products are available for comparison and selection by local and global companies. Consequently, investigating the purchasing habits of global products in both countries will provide valuable insights into the complex relationships among online purchasability, social contribution, and actual purchase behavior in the global consumer market.

**Table 2**
A brief description of the sample in the two surveys.

| Variables | Total sample | South Korea | Japan |
|---|---|---|---|
| | n = 1033 | n = 545 | n = 488 |
| *Gender* | | | |
| Male | 517 | 270 | 247 |
| Female | 516 | 275 | 241 |
| *Age* | | | |
| Below 20 | 193 | 113 | 80 |
| 20–29 | 174 | 96 | 78 |
| 30–39 | 194 | 111 | 83 |
| 40–49 | 195 | 114 | 81 |
| 50–59 | 170 | 86 | 84 |
| Above 60 | 107 | 25 | 82 |
| *Educational level* | | | |
| High school or below | 305 | 153 | 152 |
| College/university | 662 | 344 | 318 |
| Graduate school or above | 66 | 48 | 18 |
| *Annual income*[a] | | | |
| Mean value (SD) | – | 2798.3 (2458.6) | 386.3 (542.8) |

Note: n = number of samples; SD = standard deviation.
[a] in ten thousand Korean won and Japanese yen.

**Table 3**
Constructs and measurement assessment (n = 1033).

| Constructs and scale items | Estimate[a] | AVE | CR |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Online purchasability of global products (Cronbach's α = 0.779)* | | 0.55 | 0.83 |
| The global products I usually buy are available to order online stores. | 0.63 | | |
| Online stores selling global products provide almost the same retail services (such as products, price, promotion) compared with those of offline stores. | 0.63 | | |
| I can trust the sales policies and operations (such as payment, return, exchange, delivery) of online stores with respect to global products. | 0.75 | | |
| It is easy and comfortable to use online stores selling global products from information retrieval to ordering. | 0.73 | | |
| *Social contribution of global companies (Cronbach's α = 0.906)* | | 0.69 | 0.93 |
| The global company helps to solve our social problems. | 0.74 | | |
| The global company plays a role in our society beyond the economic benefits generation. | 0.80 | | |
| The global company contributes money to our culture and social events. | 0.79 | | |
| The global company uses part of its budget for donations and social projects to advance the situation of the most unprivileged groups in our society. | 0.78 | | |
| The global company is concerned with improving the general well-being of our society. | 0.88 | | |
| The global company is concerned with respecting and protecting our natural environment. | 0.73 | | |
| *Number of global products purchased* | | N/A | N/A |
| Based on your past buying behaviors during recent 6 months, if you would buy 100 items in a shopping, how many global products will be in your shopping basket?: () among a total of 100 items. | N/A | | |
| *Purchase frequency of global products* | | N/A | N/A |
| Based on your past buying behaviors during the recent 6 months, what is the average frequency of buying global products in a month?: () times in a month. | N/A | | |
| *Cross-country difference*[b] | | N/A | N/A |
| Japan (=0), South Korea (=1) | N/A | | |

Note.
[a] Estimate represents standardized factor loading.
[b] Dummy variable; AVE = average variance extracted; CR = composite reliability; N/A = not applicable.

### 4.2. Measurement

Table 3 lists the items used in this investigation. First, while we measured the online purchasability of global products using four items (Kim et al., 2022), the social contributions of global companies were measured using six items (Liu et al., 2020). A 5-point Likert scale was used to assess the two constructs (1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree"). Second, concerning the following two constructs of actual purchase behavior (Pare and Pourazad, 2017), respondents were asked to answer each question based on their buying behavior during the past six months. We used a constant sum scale to measure the number of purchasing global products by asking the number of global product items purchased among a total of 100 items in the shopping basket. Additionally, we measured the purchase frequency of global products by asking the average frequency of buying global products per month. Third, we measure the construct of cross-country differences using a dummy variable (i.e., Japan = 0, South Korea = 1). In order to obtain results that are both unbiased and more widely applicable, two key demographic factors were carefully controlled in order to evaluate the heterogeneity among participants: gender (i.e., women = 0 and men = 1) and age (i.e., a specific number).

### 4.3. Common method bias

This study adhered to Lindell and Whitney's (2001) recommendations to minimize concerns about common method bias, using SPSS Statistics 29. We used a theoretically unrelated scale item (i.e., "I often feel a bit uncomfortable trying out new products, even though it may be beneficial to me"). as a covariate in our dataset ($|r|_{\text{total sample}}$ = 0.04–0.13). The outcomes of this test show no significant disparities between the observed and adjusted correlations ($\Delta|r|_{\text{total sample}}$ = 0.00–0.01). This implies that the common method bias does not significantly impact our data.

## 5. Analysis and results

### 5.1. Construct validity

Using SPSS Amos 29, this study carried out a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to evaluate the measurement model. The results indicated a satisfactory model fit of the measurement model ($\chi^2_{\text{total sample}}$ (31) = 88.43, $p < 0.001$, CMIN/DF = 2.85, GFI = 0.98, CFI = 0.99, IFI = 0.99, RMSEA = 0.04) and robust validity of the constructs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Specifically, we began by evaluating the average variance extracted (AVE) to assess convergent validity. As presented in Table 4, the AVE values for both constructs were acceptable and exceeded the 0.5 threshold (AVE of 0.55–0.69). Discriminant validity was examined by comparing the AVE values for each pair of constructs with the shared variances ($r^2$), as presented in Table 4. The analysis showed that the shared variance ($r^2$ = 0.09) between online purchasability and social contribution did not surpass the AVE values.

### 5.2. Measurement invariance

To investigate cross-country differences, we employed a multi-group CFA to assess measurement invariance, which involved data from South Korea and Japan (Kim and Kinoshita, 2023; Steenkamp and Baumgartner, 1998). Specifically, using SPSS Amos 29, we compared a configural invariance model (i.e., an unconstrained model) and a full metric invariance model (i.e., all factor loadings of each item were equal) using a chi-square ($\chi^2$) difference test. However, as summarized in Table 5, the results of the comparison between the two models using a $\chi^2$ difference test showed significant differences in the model fit ($\Delta\chi^2(8) = 18.38$, $p$ = 0.019), suggesting that full metric invariance was not supported. To address this issue, following Steenkamp and Baumgartner's (1998) recommendation, we developed a model of partial metric invariance

**Table 4**
Descriptive statistics and correlation matrix (n = 1033).

| | Mean | SD | X1 | X2 | X3 | X4 | X5 | X6 | X7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| X1 Online purchasability of global products | 3.23 | 0.67 | *0.75* | | | | | | |
| X2 Social contribution of global companies | 2.80 | 0.71 | 0.30[b] | *0.83* | | | | | |
| X3 Number of global products purchased | 18.30 | 23.59 | 0.21[b] | 0.08[b] | *N/A* | | | | |
| X4 Purchase frequency of global products | 1.33 | 2.44 | 0.12[b] | 0.05 | 0.27[b] | *N/A* | | | |
| X5 Cross-country difference[a] | 0.53 | 0.50 | 0.17[b] | −0.20* | −0.12[b] | 0.08[b] | *N/A* | | |
| X6 Age | 38.03 | 15.60 | −0.10[b] | −0.05 | −0.15[b] | −0.11[b] | −0.18[b] | *N/A* | |
| X7 Gender[a] | 0.50 | 0.50 | −0.03 | −0.01 | 0.04 | 0.03 | −0.01 | 0.02 | *N/A* |

Note.
[a] Dummy variable; AVE = average variance extracted; SD = standard deviation; italic numbers in the diagonal row are square roots of AVE values; N/A = not applicable.
[b] $p < 0.05$.

**Table 5**
Measurement invariance test (n = 1033).

| Model | $\chi^2/df$ | NFI | IFI | RFI | TLI | $\Delta\chi^2/\Delta$df ($p$ value) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Model 1: Configural invariance[a] | 164.29/62 | 0.967 | 0.979 | 0.952 | 0.969 | – |
| Mode 2: Full metric invariance[b] | 182.67/70 | 0.963 | 0.977 | 0.953 | 0.970 | 18.38/8 (0.019) |
| Mode 3: Partial metric invariance[c] | 173.93/68 | 0.965 | 0.978 | 0.954 | 0.971 | 9.65/6 (0.140) |

Note.
[a] Model unconstrained.
[b] Model constrained by all factor loadings.
[c] Model constrained by factor loadings after relaxing two items.

(Model 3) that involves relaxing the constrained factor loadings for two items with high modification indices for the construct of social contribution. We then compared this model with an unconstrained baseline model (Model 1) and found no significant differences in the model fit ($\Delta\chi^2(6) = 9.65$, $p = 0.140$). This suggests that the measurement invariance issues between the two datasets were not a major problem in our investigation.

### 5.3. Hypothesis testing

To test the hypotheses, this study employed Hayes' PROCESS macro and a moderated moderated mediation approach (Hayes, 2018). This method and approach are based on regression analysis with a percentile bootstrapping method that includes 5000 samples. To prevent multicollinearity, all the predictors were mean-centered before generating an interaction term. The findings of this study are summarized in Table 6.

First, regarding the direct and indirect effects in Model 4 (independent variable [IV] = online purchasability, dependent variable [DV] =

**Table 6**
Results and hypotheses testing (n = 1033).

| IVs, DVs, and hypotheses | Models with Hayes' PROCESS macro | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Model 4 | | | Model 7 | | | Model 11 | | |
| | b | 95% CI | | b | 95% CI | | b | 95% CI | |
| | | Lower | Upper | | Lower | Upper | | Lower | Upper |
| *Regression Model 1 (DV = Number of global products purchased, NGPP)* | | | | | | | | | |
| Online purchasability of global products (OPGP) | 6.851*** | | | 7.770*** | | | 10.055*** | | |
| Social contribution of global companies (SCGC) | | | | 0.155 | | | 0.407 | | |
| Cross-country difference (CCD) | | | | | | | −8.131*** | | |
| OPGP × SCGC | | | | 2.405* | | | 4.773*** | | |
| OPGP × CCD | | | | | | | −2.589 | | |
| SCGC × CCD | | | | | | | −2.125 | | |
| OPGP × SCGC × CCD | | | | | | | −5.570** | | |
| Age | −0.198*** | | | −0.193*** | | | −0.240*** | | |
| Gender | 2.249 | | | 2.219 | | | 2.228 | | |
| *Regression Model 2 (DV = Purchase frequency of global products, PFGP)* | | | | | | | | | |
| **H1**. Online purchasability of global products (OPGP) | 0.231* | | | 0.231* | | | 0.231* | | |
| Number of global products purchased (NGPP) | 0.025*** | | | 0.025*** | | | 0.025*** | | |
| Age | −0.011* | | | −0.011* | | | −0.011* | | |
| Gender[b] | 0.108 | | | 0.108 | | | 0.108 | | |
| **H2**. Indirect effect of OPGP on PFGP | 0.173 | 0.096 | 0.265 | | | | | | |
| **H3**. Moderated mediation effect of SCGC | | | | 0.063 | 0.006 | 0.164 | | | |
| Conditional indirect effects by SCGC | | | | | | | | | |
| −1 SD below mean value | | | | 0.151 | 0.078 | 0.235 | | | |
| Mean value | | | | 0.196 | 0.102 | 0.321 | | | |
| +1 SD above mean value | | | | 0.241 | 0.117 | 0.425 | | | |
| **H4**. Moderated moderated mediation effect of CCD | | | | | | | −0.140 | −0.323 | −0.030 |
| Conditional moderated mediation effects by CCD | | | | | | | | | |
| Japan (=0) | | | | | | | 0.120 | 0.033 | 0.273 |
| South Korea (=1) | | | | | | | −0.020 | −0.102 | 0.052 |

Note: Cross-country differences (0 = Japan, 1 = South Korea) and gender (0 = female, 1 = male) are dummy variables; b = unstandardized coefficients; 95% CI = lower/upper limit of the 95% percentile bootstrap confidence interval with a dataset of 5000; IV = independent variable; DV = dependent variable; NGPP = number of global products purchased; OPGP = online purchasability of global products; CCD = cross-country difference; SCGC = social contribution of global companies; PFGP = purchase frequency of global products; SD = standard deviation; ***$p < 0.001$, **$p < 0.01$, and *$p < 0.05$.

purchase frequency of global products), while the results of this study suggest a positive and direct impact of online purchasability on consumers' purchase frequency of global products (H1, $b = 0.231$, $p = 0.039$), we observe that the positive indirect effect of online purchasability on purchase frequency through an increased number of global products purchased is significant (H2, $b = 0.173$, 95% confidence interval [CI] = [0.096, 0.265]), as expected. Hence, H1 and H2 are supported. Additionally, our findings reveal that the direct relationship between online purchasability and the number of global products purchased ($b = 6.851$, $p < 0.001$) and the number of global products and purchase frequency ($b = 0.025$, $p < 0.001$) are significant.

Second, concerning the moderated mediation effect of global companies' social contributions in Model 7 (IV = online purchasability, mediator = number of global products purchased, DV = purchase frequency of global products), the results of this study show that such social contributions strengthen the positive indirect link between online purchasability and the purchase frequency of global products (H3, $b = 0.063$, 95% CI = [0.006, 0.164]). Additionally, the two-way interaction effect between online purchasability and number of global products purchased was significant ($b = 2.405$, $p = 0.016$). Furthermore, we found a significant conditional indirect effect with both −1 SD below the mean value of social contribution ($b = 0.151$, 95% CI = [0.078, 0.235]) and +1 SD above the mean value of social contribution ($b = 0.241$, 95% CI = [0.117, 0.425]). Thus, H3 is supported.

Third, regarding the moderated moderated mediation of a cross-country difference (i.e., Japan = 0, South Korea = 1) in Model 11 (IV = online purchasability, mediator = number of global products purchased, moderators = social contribution of global companies and cross-country difference between Japan coded as 0 vs. South Korea coded as 1, DV = purchase frequency of global products), we found that this effect is statistically significant (H4, $b = -0.140$, 95% CI = [−0.323, −0.030]). Additionally, a three-way interaction effect between online purchasability, social contribution, and cross-country difference in the number of global products purchased is significant ($b = -5.570$, $p = 0.010$). However, in contrast to our prediction, our findings suggested that compared to South Koreans ($b = -0.020$, 95% CI = [−0.102, 0.052]), Japanese consumers with a high evaluation of social contribution are stronger for the positive indirect link between online purchasability and the purchase frequency via the number of global products purchased ($b = 0.120$, 95% CI = [0.033, 0.273]. Therefore, H4 is not supported. However, this finding is interesting and is elucidated in Section 6.

## 6. Implications and discussion

Our study highlights that global companies' social contribution enhances the positive indirect effect of online purchasability on purchase frequency by increasing the number of global products purchased. Additionally, we discovered that Japanese consumers with a high perception of social contribution exhibited a stronger relationship between online purchasability and purchase frequency than South Korean consumers. This study provides valuable insights into the complex interplay between online purchasability, social contribution, and actual purchase behavior in the global consumer market.

### 6.1. Theoretical implications

This study has three major theoretical implications. First, it contributes to the existing literature by exploring the explanatory mechanisms that link online purchasability to actual purchase behavior. While prior studies have demonstrated the importance of the benefits and quality factors of online sales channels on purchase decisions (e.g., Al-Adwan et al., 2022; Al-Debei et al., 2015; Duarte et al., 2018), they have primarily relied on subjective statements from consumers as outcome variables, such as attitude and intention toward online shopping. By contrast, drawing on insights from the ECM, while we show an intriguing causal linkage between purchase quantity and frequency, we enhance our understanding of the effect of online purchasability on purchase frequency by emphasizing the mediating role of purchase quantity.

Specifically, this approach extends the ECM literature by moving beyond its traditional focus, which typically explores the relationship between perceived usefulness and repeated usage intention through user satisfaction in online contexts (Bhattacherjee, 2001). We broaden the ECM studies by replacing user satisfaction with the number of global products purchased and examining its role as a precursor to repeated purchasing behavior. Consequently, in response to recent calls for research (Verstraeten et al., 2023), this study enriches the existing literature by providing concrete evidence of actual online shopping behaviors, including the quantity of items purchased and purchase frequency.

Second, by focusing on the usefulness of the online sales channel strategy, this study helps us better understand whether and how global companies' CSR activities reinforce consumers' global product purchases. Despite the various touchpoints through which consumers encounter global products in the era of globalization (Huang and Chang, 2019; Velocity Global, 2023), these products belong to less familiar categories, where consumers perceive significant psychological, informational, and economic barriers. Given the trend of global product diffusion, it is imperative to assess the impact of external cues that serve as buffers, mitigating these obstacles and shaping consumers' ongoing purchases of global products. While previous studies on online retailing have examined the influence of explicit cues (e.g., product reviews and return policies) provided by e-retailers on decision-making through the lens of signaling theory (Bhattacharya et al., 2023; Shao et al., 2021), the impact of consumer awareness of CSR activities on specific changes in purchase behaviors remains largely unexplored. Applying signaling theory, we highlight that social contributions act as potential marketing signals that enhance the perceived usefulness or attractiveness of online purchasing, thereby increasing consumers' confidence in online purchases. Thus, this study contributes to the literature on global product purchases by extending the warm-glow effect of CSR signals in the online commerce context.

Third, this study is novel in demonstrating how country-specific contexts influence the interaction between online purchasability and social contribution, thereby providing a more comprehensive prediction of consumers' global product purchases. To elucidate cross-national differences, we selected South Korea and Japan for comparison. These countries show considerable variation in online purchasability, particularly in terms of maturity (ECDB, 2023a; ECDB, 2023b), as well as in consumer expectations regarding CSR practices (Kim and Kinoshita, 2023; Kong and Ko, 2017), despite their geographical proximity. This study hypothesized that South Korea strengthens the positive moderated mediation effect of social contributions compared to Japan (H3). However, the results of this study supported the opposite hypothesis, suggesting that the interaction effect between online purchasability and social contribution is stronger for Japanese consumers than for South Koreans. The rationale for these unanticipated findings is as follows.

According to the cognitive dissonance theory, individuals experience psychological discomfort when they hold contradictory beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors (Festinger, 1957; Hinojosa et al., 2017). To alleviate this discomfort, individuals are motivated to modify their beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors to achieve consistency. Applying these insights, we can assume that, despite valuing the social contributions of global companies, South Koreans (who have already normalized online shopping and display stable beliefs and behaviors toward online shopping) may not significantly enhance their motivation to purchase global products. In contrast, in Japan, although the proportion of online purchases is relatively low compared with South Korea, a noticeable trend toward online shopping is observed (Inoue and Todo, 2023), indicating a positive attitude that has yet to fully translate into behavior, possibly because of perceived risks (Kwon and Lennon, 2009). By presenting Japanese consumers with cues regarding social contributions, we

believe that such information can act as a powerful motivator to reconcile the discrepancy between their positive perceptions and attitudes toward online shopping and their hesitancy to participate in it. This results in a relatively stronger impact of social contribution on the link between online purchasability and actual purchase behavior in Japan than in South Korea.

In conclusion, given the increased purchasability of global products through e-commerce, it is essential to understand the country-specific characteristics in evaluating retail environments (i.e., online channels) and the companies' marketing efforts (i.e., CSR practices) as a preliminary step to fostering continuous consumer purchases of global products. Therefore, employing a cross-country approach in our study is essential for obtaining a comprehensive understanding of consumer purchasing behavior in online settings. This study significantly contributes to the literature on online consumer behavior, ECM, and signaling theory by elucidating the combined effects of online sales channel strategies, CSR activities, and cross-country differences.

### 6.2. Managerial implications

This study provides three practical insights for global companies. First, global company managers should reaffirm the importance of e-commerce markets as effective sales channels for promoting global product purchases. Our findings indicate that increasing the share of global product purchases in a single shopping trip is essential for encouraging repeat and continuous buying behavior. Given consumers' risk perceptions related to the psychological, cost-related, and informational aspects of global products, we emphasize the practical advantages of online sales channels unconstrained by time or space limitations. Experiencing global products through online sales channels diminishes consumers' perceived barriers to purchasing them.

For instance, managers may develop consumer-oriented shopping environments to ensure that consumers recognize the usefulness of online platforms at every phase in the purchasing process, from initial information search to final purchase decision. This significance is especially pronounced in online sales channels, where the absence of salespeople requires consumers to navigate their shopping journey independently. Thus, it becomes crucial to provide comprehensive information about the diverse range of global products and sellers, as well as to clarify the sales and operational policies of the online store. These actions foster consumer trust in products and sellers, enhance the perceived usefulness of online stores, and thereby promote engagement with global products in e-commerce markets.

Second, for businesses to positively impact global society, they must invest in tangible and intangible resources. Our study highlights that when online purchasability is clear, perceived CSR activities can be key signals driving consumer purchasing behavior. Managers should recognize that once consumers feel satisfied with their online purchasing experience, they will be naturally swayed by companies' marketing endeavors, which encompass addressing consumer, societal, ethical, and environmental concerns. Cao et al. (2024) note that the versatility of digital platforms provides an effective avenue for companies to distribute their CSR information to various stakeholders. In light of this insight and our findings, it is imperative for companies to employ appropriate digital communication channels tailored to their target audience to effectively disseminate their CSR initiatives and convey their social contributions.

Third, managers must consider cross-country differences in online shopping maturity to understand how social contribution factors shape their purchasing decisions. Our research shows that Japanese consumers rely more on external cues of social contribution than South Koreans when buying global products through online sales channels. This finding suggests that the impact of CSR activities as marketing signals can be amplified among consumers who are less familiar with online shopping. Managers should employ multiple touchpoints to promote CSR initiatives effectively for Japanese consumers. For instance, by recognizing that Japanese consumers still strongly prefer offline stores, businesses can adopt a two-way public relations strategy. This involves using both offline and online channels to communicate CSR efforts and activities, thus enabling Japanese consumers to make informed and confident purchasing decisions regarding global products.

### 6.3. Limitation and future research

This study has some limitations. First, given the recent studies on the diverse and novel aspects of online sales channels (Table 1), our model may seem simplified in filling the literature gap discussed in our research questions. Therefore, future research should develop a more comprehensive model by applying insights from recent research relevant to online sales channel strategies (e.g., social presence, Li et al., 2024; entertainment seeking, Hagen et al., 2024; online channel perceived novelty, Frasquet et al., 2024; integrated customer service, Xie et al., 2023) and incorporate additional moderating variables that could influence the combined effect of online sales channel strategy and CSR on actual purchase behavior in diverse product and service settings, such as customer trust (Al-Adwan et al., 2022), brand strength (Kim et al., 2022), and product quality (Verstraeten et al., 2023).

Second, enhancing the sampling technique and ensuring data collection accuracy are difficult tasks. While a quota sampling method seems to be widely accepted for demographic variables, such as gender and age, when employing a stratified sampling technique for gender, the exact ratio between males and females is closely related to age and may depend on how the research sets the upper limit for the age of the targeted respondents considered valid consumer responses. For example, in Japan, a well-known super-aging society, the percentage of females is higher than that of males in the total population; however, it is evident that the ratio of males to females is higher when targeting potential respondents <79 years old. Therefore, given the advent of an aging society in many countries, future research should devise sampling techniques and consider sample selection criteria in terms of gender and age to obtain unbiased and generalizable results.

Third, the influence of online sales channels and CSR can vary across industries and specific research contexts such as consumer boycotts (Kim and Kinoshita, 2023). Future studies should explore these relationships across various sectors and contexts. Third, we focused only on consumers in South Korea and Japan, which may limit our findings' generalizability to other regions and cultural contexts. To enhance our findings' external validity, future research should expand this scope by incorporating and broadening diverse cultural perspectives. Finally, some researchers found disparities in the impact of shopping channels between online and offline settings (Verstraeten et al., 2023). Future investigations could analyze the efficacy of online sales platforms and social contribution cues in both online and offline contexts to understand how these variables interact to influence global product purchases across various shopping environments.

## CRediT authorship contribution statement

**Changju Kim:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Supervision, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Ha Kyung Lee:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Woo Bin Kim:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Ihsan Ullah Jan:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Dong Il Lee:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Conceptualization. **Kuang-Wen Wu:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Conceptualization.

## Declaration of competing interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

## Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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