



The Effect of Corporate Social Responsibility Communication on Corporate Citizenship, Corporate Reputation & Behavior Intention

Maintaining & Strengthening a Good Corporate Reputation

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- Maintaining & Strengthening a Good Corporate Reputation

Abstract

Over the past few years, communicating on corporate social responsibility has become a common tool for organizations to influence consumers' perceptions. This study discovered how CSR communication can affect the perceived corporate citizenship and corporate reputation. Previous research failed to address the influence of framing in combination with a certain level of transparency on consumers' perceptions as well as behavioral intention. To find answers, 152 people participated in the conducted online experiment. They were exposed to a CSR message that incorporated a message frame and a specific level of transparency. The study results indicated that the use of both corporate-praising framing and consumer-praising framing in CSR communication had some effect on consumers' perceptions and their behavioral intention. Furthermore, the use of a high level of transparency positively influenced the corporate reputation. A favorable corporate reputation appeared to stimulate the behavioral intention of consumers. Simultaneously, the differences in values and lifestyles of people were taken into account. It was acknowledged that some people show a high interest in CSR whereas others have little interest, which influences the relationship between CSR communication and the perceived corporate citizenship. The study results showed that a high level of personal-CSR fit enhances the corporate citizenship, while a low level of personal-CSR fit diminishes the corporate citizenship. By exploring how message framing and transparency in CSR communication influence corporate citizenship, corporate reputation and behavioral intention, research gaps are filled. Yet more importantly, organizations will now have a better view on how to customize their CSR communication in order to influence consumers' perceptions and experience positive effects. When consumers' perceptions are positively influenced, the corporate reputation will strengthen.

Key Words: Corporate Social Responsibility, CSR Communication, Corporate Citizenship, Corporate Reputation, Behavioral Intention

Preface

Looking back to the thesis process over the past months, I can honestly say that I have enjoyed writing this thesis, which is something I did not experience before. At the early stage of the process, I decided to take on a challenge and conduct a quantitative research instead of doing a qualitative research I was more experienced with. I am happy I chose this path and was able to do this with my dear supervisor Dr. Yijing Wang. Completing this dissertation would not have been possible without her thoughtful, yet straightforward advice. I thank her for that.

Still there is more. Once, during a class, she mentioned she saw herself as “a guide on the side” for students during their university career. I can say she was much more than only the thesis guide on the side. Dr. Wang does not only teach and grade, but she invests time in getting to know her students. Which she does by organizing games like Secret Santa and planning small get-togethers with her students. I valued her personal touch and praise her for that.

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Abstract & Key Words

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1. Introduction

Around the 1950s, companies began to perform social activities beside their daily business practices. This initial form of corporate social responsibility started on small scale with a focus on serving and doing good for society. Around the millennium change, organizations began to integrate corporate social responsibility (hereafter referred to as CSR) as a way to improve and manage the corporate legitimacy and corporate reputation (Farache & Perks, 2010). In the meantime, CSR has become a globally used term incorporated by all kind of organizations. It now represents something greater than corporations solely taking responsibility for their impact on societies as well as the environment.

While organizations incorporated CSR into their daily business practices, they also began to extensively communicate about their CSR efforts to the public. This was in response to the stakeholders' demand for more information on the organizational impact on society and environment. Organizations noticed that by communicating their CSR efforts, they fulfilled the public need for more information. Yet simultaneously, by satisfying the stakeholders, organizations experienced positive effects as well (Birth, Illia, Lurati, & Zamparini, 2008; Carnevale & Mazzuca, 2014; Kouchaki & Jami, 2016b; Morsing, 2006). This encouraged companies to continue communicating on their CSR efforts.

By acting responsible and communicating in a transparent manner, organizations present themselves as good citizens. In effect, the public's perceptions towards CSR strengthens, which is also described as the strengthening of the corporate citizenship. Consequently, a favorable corporate citizenship increases the corporate legitimacy. Put differently, due to CSR communication, people tend to show a higher level of reliance and acceptance towards an organization (Birth, Illia, Lurati, & Zamparini, 2008). In effect, the corporate citizenship as well as the corporate reputation strengthens. Hence, companies use CSR communication as a strategic tool in maintaining and enhancing corporate reputation as researched by Golob (2016).

In the end, positive corporate reputations are likely to lead to a sustainable profit and a competitive advantage (Roberts & Dowling, 2002). This indicates that not only the corporate citizenship and the overall reputation benefit from CSR communication, the consumer-company relationship strengthens as well. A strong relationship between consumers and companies lead to favorable behavioral intentions of consumers, meaning that consumers are most likely to purchase products at a company they trust and find reputable. Nevertheless, research states that a good customer-company relationship is established when the personal values and lifestyle of consumers match the corporate vision and CSR actions. Therefore, it is important to create a personal fit between the company's

CSR efforts and the consumers (Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, & Hill, 2006), which will be referred to as the personal-CSR fit throughout this research. A high personal-CSR fit implies that consumers' values and expectations related to CSR are met by an organization's product or brand. A high fit will lead to a favorable consumer attitude, which consequently may influence the purchase decisions of consumers positively. A low personal-CSR fit indicates that consumers' lifestyles and values do not fit an organization's CSR activities. Organizations will thus not experience any benefits regarding the corporate reputation and behavioral intention. This research therefore focuses on the influence of the personal-CSR fit among consumers on corporate citizenship, corporate reputation and behavioral intention.

Based on research conducted by Kouchaki and Jami (2016a; 2016b), CSR communication can be placed in two frames: corporate-praising or consumer-praising. The corporate-referencing frame presents an organization's values and demonstrates its social efforts. So, it focuses on communicating the positive effects of a business' CSR practices in order to attract customers. For instance, when communicating on a CSR program, companies could use a slogan such as "our recycling program protects the environment" (Kouchaki & Jami, 2016a, par. 6). On the contrary, consumer-praising messages compliment consumers by contributing to the organization's social efforts when purchasing a product or service. In this way, altruistic consumer behavior is promoted. By pointing out the positive influence the consumer will have by buying a product or service, consumers are stimulated to purchase this product or service and will have a satisfied feeling afterwards. When using the consumer-praising frame, organizations could communicate a message such as "with every product you purchase, [we] will help a person in need" (Kouchaki & Jami, 2016a, par. 2).

The different effects of corporate-praising framing and consumer-praising on consumer behavior have only been studied recently (Kouchaki & Jami, 2016b). Both frames were analyzed on advantages and disadvantages, it appeared that each frame causes a different behavioral consequence. The corporate-praising frame leads to actual altruistic behavior among consumers, whereas the consumer-praising frame gives consumers a reason to serve their own interest first. So, research showed that the two frames result in two different consumer behaviors. Yet, interestingly, it is not yet explored how the two frames influence the consumers' perception on corporate citizenship, corporate reputation and behavioral intention.

Furthermore, openly reporting on the corporate social efforts is linked to transparency (Baraibar-Diez & Luna Sotorrío, 2018). Since the public trust increases, transparency is seen as an important aspect on which the corporate reputation is depending. Nevertheless, until now research has not extensively considered transparency as a mediator between CSR communication and corporate reputation. Only few studies acknowledge the key role of transparent CSR communication in maintaining and enhancing corporate credibility as well

as corporate reputation (Baraibar-Diez & Luna Sotorrío, 2018; Bentele & Nothhaft, 2011; Ihlen, 2011). Due to the limited research about the impact of transparent CSR on the corporate reputation, this research tends to fill the gap.

By exploring the influence of corporate-praising framing or consumer-praising framing in combination with a level of transparency (high or low) on corporate citizenship and corporate reputation, research gaps will be filled. Firstly, research indicates the existence of a connection between a transparent CSR message and the consumers' perception on corporate citizenship and corporate reputation. Yet, until now, this has not been explored in-depth and therefore, it is difficult to confirm a connection. Hence, this research will focus on the influence of transparency on the perceived corporate citizenship and the corporate reputation. Moreover, the effect of using corporate-praising framing or consumer-praising framing on consumer behavior has been studied only recently by Kouchaki and Jami (2016b). This was however not done in combination with different levels of transparency. Therefore, this study explores the influence of transparency (high vs. low) combined with a communication frame (corporate-praising vs. consumer-praising) on corporate citizenship, corporate reputation and the behavioral intention of consumers. Based on these research findings, organizations are advised on what combination of framing and transparency will provide the best result for their corporate citizenship and corporate reputation as well as the consumers' purchasing behavior. All in all, this research aspires to provide insights on how organizations can maintain and improve their corporate reputation. In the end, a good reputation is crucial to increase profit and develop a stronger market position (Roberts & Dowling, 2002).

By bringing the presented conditions (transparency, framing and personal-CSR fit) together to create a communication strategy recommendation, the following research question is posed:

RQ: What is the influence of framing (corporate-praising vs. consumer-praising) and transparency (high vs. low) in CSR communication on perceived corporate citizenship, corporate reputation and behavioral intention of consumers?

2. Theoretical Framework

In the following chapter, the theoretical framework is discussed. The framework contains key concepts that form the basis for this study and will support the development of hypotheses. All concepts important to this study are discussed: corporate social responsibility, corporate reputation, corporate citizenship, CSR communication, transparency, behavioral intention of consumers and personal-CSR fit. At the end of this chapter, a conceptual model is presented. This will give a visual overview on the relationships between the variables that are discussed in this chapter.

2.1. Corporate Social Responsibility

2.1.1. The Conceptualization of Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate social responsibility is a concept that still gradually develops causing a lack of a unified definition (Lai, Chiu, Yang & Pai, 2010). From a business perspective, CSR is described as “voluntary activities taken by corporations to enhance economic, social, and environmental performance voluntarily” (Lai et al., 2010, p. 458). Moreover, Mohr, Webb and Harris (2001) defined CSR as a corporate’s commitment to diminish or defeat any detrimental consequences and expand the long-term beneficial effect on society. Both definitions show that social efforts are based on corporate values, ideas and goals. So, the CSR efforts are based on internal motives to ensure corporate survival.

In contrast, from a stakeholder perspective, CSR definitions acknowledge the position of stakeholders (groups or individuals) that are affected by the business’ activities. According to Simmons (2004), companies considering all stakeholders recognize the interests of the traditional stakeholder groups (e.g. employees and investors) as well as the silent stakeholders (e.g. NGOs and community groups). Acting from this perspective, organizations consider stakeholders’ expectations first. In this way, the CSR actions are not only based on the corporate view, but also on external influence.

The main difference between the corporate perspective and the stakeholder perspective is the focus. Companies practicing CSR from a corporate perspective aim to fulfill business goals, such as increasing the bottom line. Organizations operating from a stakeholder perspective first identify to whom the business is accountable to and thereafter fulfill the corporate goals (Kakabase, Rozuel, & Lee-Davies, 2005). The definition from the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) includes both perspectives: “The commitment of businesses to contribute to economic development, while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the community and society at

large” (WBCSD, 2010, as cited in Brei & Böhm, 2011, p. 236). As this research does not require a specific perspective, this CSR definition will be used throughout the research.

2.1.2. Legitimacy

Corporate social responsibility is identified in literature as a valuable commitment to gain or maintain corporate legitimacy, which contributes to enhancing corporate reputation (May, 2016). Deephouse and Carter (2005) defined legitimacy as the adherence to expectations and social values resulting in social acceptance. Likewise, as argued by Dowling & Pfeffer (1975) “legitimacy is a conferred status and embedded in a social context” (as cited in Inauen & Schoeneborn, 2014, p. 287). These definitions show the importance of organizations complying with the consumers’ expectations in order to achieve legitimacy as an approval to operate.

According to Suchman (1995), legitimate organizations are perceived “not only as more worthy, but as more meaningful, more predictable, and more trustworthy” as well (as cited in Wæraas & Ihlen, 2009, p. 86). Organizations that create an environmental legitimacy among stakeholders do compete more successfully against others (Lamin & Zaheer, 2012). Nevertheless, the corporate legitimacy is sensitive for the discrepancy between society’s expectations and the business’ actual social actions (Wæraas & Ihlen, 2009). The societal values and expectations change constantly, which may cause a disparity between what the public expects and businesses actually do. This is referred to as the legitimacy gap (Sethi, 1977, in Islam, 2015). Another factor causing a gap is when hidden information about a company’s practices becomes public information and does not match with the public’s expectations. So, the possibility of losing the gained legitimacy is a real threat to companies. Moreover, Yaziji & Doh (2009) argued that legitimacy can never be fully owned or fully controlled by either companies or stakeholders, which increases the risk to lose the corporate legitimacy status. Therefore, the level of legitimacy among consumers should be constantly monitored and taken into account by organizations. Therefore, firms should actively be engaged in a public dialogue with their stakeholders, in order to increase and maintain legitimacy and thus strengthen the corporate reputation (Nanz & Steffek, 2005, in Inauen & Schoeneborn, 2014).

2.2. Corporate Reputation

According to Sen, Bhattacharya and Korschun (2006), stakeholders are likely to respond positively to businesses that are involved in CSR activities. Therefore, this is perceived as a motivation for companies to include CSR efforts and communication into the business strategy, and in this way, preserve and promote the corporate reputation (Jones, Wyatt &

Daube, 2016). One crucial factor of enhancing the corporate reputation is legitimacy, which is hence viewed as “a precursor or antecedent to reputation” (Doh, Howton, Howton, & Siegel, 2010, p. 1465). To increase the public legitimacy and enhance the corporate reputation, a company is required to meet the stakeholders’ expectations (Deephouse & Carter, 2005; Lamin & Zaheer, 2012; and Wæraas & Ihlen, 2009).

2.2.1. The Conceptualization of Corporate Reputation

No unified definition of corporate reputation can be found in literature. From an economic perspective, reputation depends on stakeholder expectations towards a company, especially the product and/or service quality (Rindova, Williamson, Petkova, & Sever, 2005). Hence, the perceived reputation is mainly based on past experiences from customers. On the contrary, from an institutional perspective, reputation relies on the shared perception of different stakeholders (Rindova et al., 2005). Moreover, when consumers compare the corporate achievements as well as the organizational status of one company to the achievements and status of another company, the perceived reputation is created (Deephouse & Carter, 2005; King & Whetten, 2008). Therefore, it is assumed that reputation is depended upon the company’s social impact and the information exchange among individual stakeholders. This determines the company’s position in society and its reputation. Hence, reputation is about having a better image than competitors.

Besides evaluating the separate definitions perspectives, Fombrun (1996) included both economic and institutional perspectives by defining corporate reputation as “a perceptual representation of a company’s past actions and future prospects that describe the firm’s overall appeal to all its key constituents when compared to other leading rivals” (as cited in Robert & Dowling, 2002, p. 1078). After analyzing all aforementioned definitions, one commonality is identified: reputation depends on the stakeholders’ perceptions. Thus, to acquire a good reputation requires a company to fulfill the stakeholders’ expectations.

Wæraas & Ihlen (2009) argued that when the societal or stakeholders’ expectations are met by firms, the corporate legitimacy, and hence the corporate reputation, is strengthened. Simultaneously, if organizations are not able to meet society’s expectations, it is likely they receive critique, which is likely to create a bad reputation. So, as research from King and Whetten (2008), and Wæraas and Ihlen (2009) confirmed as well, strong corporate legitimacy among the public is linked to a strong corporate reputation. Moreover, Waddock and Graves (1997) concluded that legitimacy can be retrieved through the corporate CSR commitment. Later research confirmed this. Consequently, good corporate reputations are likely to lead to a sustainable profit and a competitive advantage (Roberts & Dowling, 2002).

2.2.2. Corporate Citizenship

According to the Reputation Institute (2017a), CSR is “increasingly a top driver of stakeholder support” (par. 1). By meeting the societal and stakeholder expectations, an organization can increase the support and enhance the corporate reputation. Scientists acknowledged the effect of CSR on the corporate reputation (Fukukawa, Balmer & Gray, 2007; Soppe, Schauten, Soppe & Kaymak, 2011). A positive public CSR perception is developed when the public considers that corporate leaders are actively engaged in reaching CSR goals, when the CSR activities align with the corporate purposes, and when the organization has a proactive CSR agenda (Reputation Institute, 2017b). By meeting these consumer expectations, stakeholder support increases and the reputation towards the corporate CSR improves.

Lewis (2001) used seven different criteria to define the ‘CSR reputation’: 1) quality of products/services, 2) customer service, 3) treatment of staff, 4) financial performance, 5) quality of management, 6) environmental responsibility, and 7) social responsibility. These seven dimensions relate to the corporate responsibility, referring to the need to meet stakeholder expectations in taking responsible actions. However, critics state that there is no complete or correct set of criteria defining ‘CSR reputation’, because different scientists incorporate different types of concepts to draw a definition (Soppe et al., 2011).

The Reputation Institute used three different concepts to define and measure the public CSR reputation of which one of them is ‘corporate citizenship’ (2017b). This dimension is described as the added value of companies to people and the environment that go beyond the delivering products and services (Reputation Institute, 2018). A different definition came from Matten and Crane (2005) who define corporate citizenship as “the role of the corporation in administering citizenship rights for individuals” (p. 173). Here, the organization is able to arrange some necessities for good citizenship for stakeholders. However, the definition is limited to human rights and politics, whereas corporate citizenship can include more activities, such as an environmental focus. Following the view of Fombrun, Ponzi and Newburry (2015), corporate citizenship is a strategic asset that creates legitimacy among consumers, which creates trust and consequently stimulates stakeholder support. By acting responsible, organizations present themselves as good citizens. Here, the definition is not limited to specific social activities, and therefore, this definition fits best with the current research. Based on the analyzed definitions, corporate citizenship will represent the public perception towards the corporate CSR.

Schnietz and Epstein (2005) studied how the perceived corporate citizenship can protect firms during a crisis. Evidence showed that corporate citizenship is able to protect the overall corporate reputation and decreases financial loss. Siltaoja (2006) confirmed the existing link between the perceived corporate citizenship and corporate reputation.

Therefore, it is assumed that corporate citizenship is a key deterministic factor of corporate reputation nowadays. Since it is able to protect the corporate reputation, it is acknowledged that corporate citizenship and corporate reputation are positively connected to each other.

H1: A positive perception on corporate citizenship by consumers has a positive impact on corporate reputation.

2.3. Communicating CSR

Over the years, corporate communication has become important to businesses and more recently, CSR is concerned to be a key aspect in business communication (Arvidsson, 2010; Hetze, 2016). According to Morsing (2006), CSR communication is “designed and distributed by the company itself” to promote the CSR efforts (p. 171). Likewise, Golob (2016) viewed CSR communication as “a tool with the aim of communicating the desired CSR impression” (p. 223). Maignan and Ferrell (2004) confirmed that communication about CSR creates consumer awareness. Moreover, they concluded that CSR communication is able to create a bond between the organization and the stakeholders. So, communicating about the organizational CSR activities is a tool to influence consumer perceptions, but helps to create a company-customer relationship as well.

Kouchaki & Jami (2016b) claimed that organizations can benefit from communicating their CSR efforts, regardless if these activities are based on private responsibility (profit-focused) or social responsibility (stakeholder-focused). Therefore, it is concluded that the dissemination of CSR information supports the process of creating and maintaining the consent of stakeholders (Carnevale & Mazzuca, 2014). In line with this, Birth, Illia, Lurati, & Zamparini (2008) stated that CSR communication can be seen as a way to legitimize an organization’s behavior by trying to influence stakeholders’ and the public’s perception of a company. Moreover, Golob (2016) argued that the practice of CSR and CSR communication are “inseparable dimensions of reputation” and are likely to affect the overall company’s reputation (p. 224).

2.4. Corporate-Praising & Consumer-Praising Framing

Dr. Maryam Kouchaki and Dr. Ata Jami concluded that prior research on consumer behavior only narrowly focused on consumer perceptions, choices, and actions that affect companies instead of exploring the consequences of consumer behavior on the individual consumer (Kouchaki & Jami, 2016b). Therefore, they conducted six laboratory experiments and one field experiment to research the effects of CSR messages on general consumer behavior and intentions. The researchers argued that CSR communication not always leads to

altruistic behavior, since they found that in some cases opposite behavior may occur (Kouchaki & Jami, 2016b). Socially responsible communication can lead to self-interested consumer behavior. Therefore, the researchers posited that social marketing not only influences consumption behavior, but affects consumers more generally as well. With their studies, Kouchaki and Jami (2016b) were one of the first focusing on the underlying psychological mechanisms that steer consumer behavior, and how CSR communication can backfire.

There are two types of framing invoked in the message when communicating the CSR efforts of companies (Kouchaki & Jami, 2016a). According to the researchers, corporate-praising framing is about presenting the organization's values and the social efforts, such as what they are doing right. One example is a company communicating how they protect the environment through their recycling program (Kouchaki & Jami, 2016a). On the other hand, customer-praising communication is a tool to highlight the individual effects of the consumers. With this type of framing, consumers are praised for their (in)direct positive influence by buying a product or service (Kouchaki & Jami, 2016b). Following the previous example, a consumer-praising message could promote that if a customer buys a certain product he/she contributes to protecting the environment.

The corporate-praising frame and consumer-praising frame are not only different in use, but different in consequence as well. According to Kouchaki and Jami (2016a), corporate-praising communication is likely to stimulate more positive and altruistic behavior compared to consumer-praising communication. The positive behavior is promoted when consumers' attention is focused on the cause, instead of directing the attention towards good personal behavior. Compared to the corporate-praising frame, the consumer-praising messages stimulates consumers to buy a product in order to support a good cause. Yet, this causes consumers to behave more self-interested. This is referred to as moral licensing and confirmed by previous studies (Cascio & Plant, 2015). When people feel they do something good, they feel licensed to do something negative too when necessary. This is because they are satisfied with their overall, balanced morality (Cascio & Plant, 2015; Kouchaki & Jami, 2016b). An example of this situation is a consumer who considers throwing waste on the street instead of in the bin is justified, because earlier the consumer bought a product that helps protecting the environment. In this way, doing something bad is balanced out by doing something good, creating a balanced morality according to oneself. So, even though the customer-praise messages make consumers feel better, it often leads to less socially desirable behavior (Kouchaki & Jami, 2016b).

When companies use the corporate-praising frame, they are likely to stimulate more positive social action and socially desirable behavior among consumers. Prosocial behaviors result in an increase in the number of donations by consumers to corporate or non-profit

programs (Kouchaki & Jami, 2016b). It is therefore concluded that society and companies benefit more from corporate-praising messages compared to consumer-praising messages. In addition to Kouchaki & Jami (2016b), Berens & Popma (2014) argued that the corporate-praising communication is likely to instill positive feelings towards the brand, and therefore, create a favorable reputation. Hence, it is predicted that the use of the corporate-praising framing positively influences the perceived corporate citizenship and corporate reputation, which leads to the following hypotheses.

H2a: The use of corporate-praising framing in CSR communication has a higher positive effect on the corporate citizenship compared to consumer-praising framing.

H2b: The use of corporate-praising framing in CSR communication has a higher positive effect on the corporate reputation compared to consumer-praising framing.

2.5. Transparency

Research confirms the existing relationship between corporate reputation and the inclusion of CSR into the corporate practices (Fukukawa et al., 2007; Jones et al., 2016; Schnietz & Epstein, 2005; Siltaoja, 2006; Soppe et al., 2011). Nevertheless, the influence of transparency on corporate reputation has not been investigated extensively, let alone the influence on corporate citizenship (Baraibar-Diez & Luna Sotorrío, 2018). Nowadays, stakeholders demand more information from companies about their impact. Consequently, companies are expected to comply with this demand and be more transparent about their practices and the effects thereof (Odrizola & Baraibar-Diez, 2017).

Baraibar-Diez & Luna Sotorrío (2018) defined corporate social transparency as “the availability of relevant, understandable and timely social information by the firm in order to allow stakeholders to make rational decisions and contribute to the company’s sustainable development” (p. 9). Here, the focus is on the availability of information to stakeholders, so they can make a personal judgment. On the contrary, May (2006, in Ihlen, May & Bartlett, 2014) regarded transparency in CSR as “a prerequisite to create trust, respect, fairness, and a sense of procedural justice” (p. 33). Here, transparency is seen as a tool to develop a relationship with stakeholders. Both definitions are correct, yet when considering the implementation of transparency among organizations, it is concluded that the latter definition by May (2006, in Ihlen, May & Bartlett, 2014) is applied more often.

The demanded increase of transparency has made corporate communication scientists assume there is now a possibility for the public to inspect the company. This possibility increases the public trust (Stoker, 2016). Therefore, Bentele and Nothhaft (2011)

and Ihlen (2011) considered transparent communication to be key in creating, maintaining and increasing corporate trust and credibility. Consequently, a high public trust creates a positive corporate reputation (Bentele & Nothhaft, 2011; Ihlen, 2011). Simultaneously, Stoker (2016) found that transparent communication allows a company to differentiate itself from the competitors. In addition, it is acknowledged that trust and credibility enhance the perceived corporate citizenship, which in turn improves the corporate reputation. Therefore, it is predicted that the dissemination of transparent messages will have a positive effect on the perceived corporate citizenship and the corporate reputation, regardless the level of transparency.

H3a: The use of a high transparency level in CSR communication has a higher positive effect on the corporate citizenship compared to the use of a low level of transparency.

H3b: The use of a high transparency level in CSR communication has a higher positive effect on the corporate reputation compared to the use of a low level of transparency.

2.6. The Relationship of Reputation and Behavioral Intention

According to Keh & Xie (2009), corporations create and communicate their own identity, which consists of corporate behavior, communication and design. If customers can identify with the company's identity, a strong customer-company relationship is likely to develop (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Consumers identify with a company when their self-concept aligns with the company's identity and its products/services in order to establish a consumer-company relationship. However, there are three more key dimensions that play a role in the customer-company connection, of which customer loyalty and trust are two of them (Keh & Xie, 2009). According to Swan, Bowers & Richardson (1999), the trust characteristic influences the loyalty characteristic. A high level of trust is able to increase customers' support and thus increases loyalty. Moreover, the trust dimension is able to advance the behavioral intention (Swan et al., 1999). The fourth characteristic is the corporate reputation. Reputable businesses are likely to increase trust among customers and reinforces the identity attractiveness (Keh & Xie, 2009).

Even though the four dimensions (identity alignment, trust, loyalty and corporate reputation) are interconnected with each other, according to Keh and Xie (2009) especially reputation influences the purchase intention of consumers. However, Swan et al. (1999) considered trust to be a determining factor for the customer-company relationship and the purchase intention. Consequently, the trust dimension affects the level of consumer loyalty as well. Therefore, loyal customers are likely to buy products/services on regular basis, try

new products/services, and talk positively about the company (Keh & Xie, 2009). All in all, it is acknowledged that each characteristic has an influence on the purchase intention of consumers. However, research does not provide a conclusive answer if one dimension has a bigger impact on the behavioral intention.

Behavioral intention has been defined by Bagozzi and Burnkrant (1979, in Jung & Seock, 2016), as “a personal behavioral tendency in terms of purchasing products or services” (p. 4). It represents what consumers desire and are willing to buy in the future (Lin & Lu, 2010). Evidence is found for the direct and indirect influence of the corporate reputation on the consumers’ purchase intention (Jung & Seock, 2016; Sicilia, Ruiz, & Reynolds, 2006; Wahid & Ahmed, 2011; Wu & Lo, 2009). Moreover, Lee, Park, Rapert, & Newman (2012) concluded that the public CSR perceptions, which are linked to corporate reputation, have a positive impact on the consumer buying intention to purchase a product. Therefore, it is predicted that corporate reputation has a clear effect on the behavioral intentions of consumers, which leads to the following hypothesis.

H4: The corporate reputation has a positive effect on the behavioral intention of consumers.

2.7. Personal-CSR Fit

The CSR activities incorporated by a company will be consciously or unconsciously assessed by consumers. Consumers will determine whether the activities seem logical in relation to corporate practices as well as the cause or not (Lee, Park, Rapert, & Newman, 2012). This is seen as fit, which from a social marketing perspective is referred to as the perceived connection between a CSR activity and a company’s products and/or services, reputation and/or the target market (Varadarajan & Menon, 1988). The consumer awareness on the connection between an organization and a cause influences the consumers’ attitudes and responses (Lee et al., 2012). Marin, Ruiz and Rubio (2009) claimed that if consumers relate more strongly to an organization’s CSR efforts, the consumer-company relationship strengthens. Therefore, CSR efforts should appeal to consumers’ personal values and traits to stimulate the behavioral intention (Golob, Lah, & Jančič, 2008; Kouchaki & Jami, 2016b). For the purpose of this research, the fit between the consumer and a company’s CSR efforts will be referred to as the personal-CSR fit.

Often the impact of personal-CSR fit is measured by focusing on the importance of congruence between the corporate social efforts and the lifestyle and values of consumers. Here, the personal lifestyle influences the choice of activities that show the way in which that person wishes to live (Honkanen, Olsen, & Myrland, 2004). The values refer to the individual criteria applied to choose and rationalize the personal actions and to give value to products

and/or services (Fraj and Martinez, 2006). Fraj and Martinez (2006) found evidence for the impact of consumers' values and lifestyle on the personal ecological behavior intention. If consumers behave and consume responsibly in an environmental-friendly way, such as recycling and purchasing ecological products, they are likely to have a positive attitude towards CSR advertisements and the brand. A limitation of the research of Fraj and Martinez is that psychological effects are not included, even though they may have an impact on behavioral intention besides personal values and lifestyles.

The personal-CSR fit will determine whether consumers experience a high or a low fit towards the brand. Consequently, this will positively or negatively influence the behavioral intention of consumers. A low fit means that there is an inconsistency between consumers' lifestyle and values and company actions. This may increase doubt among consumers regarding the business' motives. Consequently, this is likely to create a bad perception and weaken the consumer-company relationship, which diminishes corporate credibility and consumer purchases, and weakens the business' market position (Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, & Hill, 2006). A high fit reinforces the relationship between a consumer and a company (Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, & Hill, 2006). If the corporate social actions meet the customers' expectations, a stable consumer-company relationship can be developed. In accordance, a good relationship will lead to a positively perceived corporate reputation, which strengthens the market position of companies. These assumptions lead to the following hypothesis.

H5: Personal CSR-fit moderates the relationship of CSR communication and corporate citizenship: A high fit enhances this relationship while a low fit weakens this relationship.

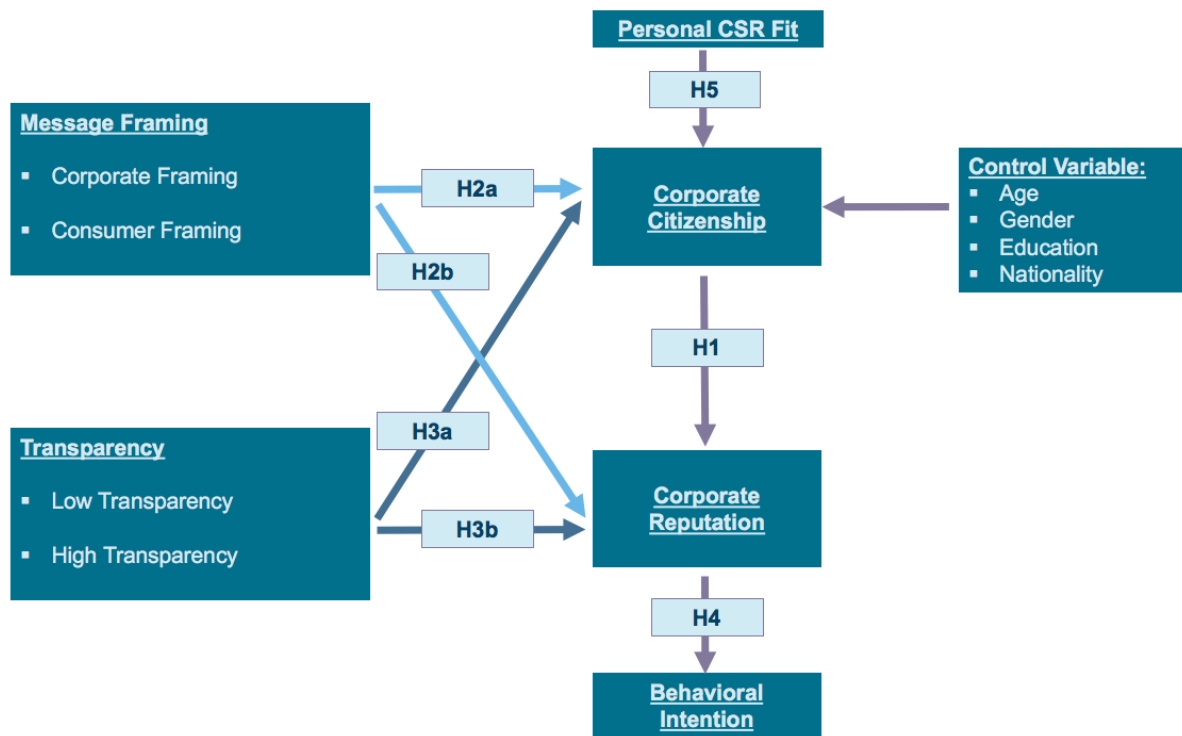


Figure 2.1: The Conceptual Model

3. Methods

In the following chapter, the process of conducting the research data is presented. Firstly, the research design is discussed. It includes information about the research method, conditions and tools. This will be followed by an explanation on the research sample and the sampling procedure. Thereafter, the actual research procedure is discussed, which contains details on how the data was collected and how the four different conditions differed from each other. Finally, the measurements as well as the data analysis process are explained.

3.1. Research Design

An online experiment was conducted in order to analyze how corporate citizenship, corporate reputation and the behavioral intention of consumers are affected by two factors with respect to CSR communication: message framing (corporate-praising vs. consumer-praising) and transparency (high vs. low). According to Kirk's definition (2009), an experimental design is "a plan for assigning experimental units to treatment levels and the statistical analysis associated with the plan" (p. 23). In other words, the research units of this current research were randomly exposed to participants who were attributed to different experiment conditions. Most importantly, the results led to new insights contributing to CSR research. One of the reasons to adopt an experimental method for this study was because Spencer, Zanna and Fong (2005) considered the use of experiments to be effective in finding a cause and an effect between the established dependent and independent variables. Furthermore, the possibility to control the conditions of message framing and transparency was likely to provide reliable results and give insights into the influence of transparency and message framing in advertisements on consumers' perception (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009).

The experiment exposed participants to corporate social responsibility communication of an unknown organization. More specifically, there were four different CSR messages incorporating both message framing (corporate-praising vs. consumer-praising) as well as levels of transparency (high vs. low). The between subject design method was used for this experiment to test the influence of the four conditions on corporate citizenship and corporate reputation. With this particular method, each participant was randomly exposed to one of the four treatments (Charness, Gneezy & Kuhn, 2012). By comparing the behavior of the respondents of one treatment to the behavior of others with another treatment, causal estimates were obtained.

The designed corporate messages the participants were exposed to came from a fictitious company. The fictional company was an imaginary, non-existent business created by the researcher, and was used for research purposes only. By using the fictitious company,

participants were solely influenced by the research conditions and not by pre-existent biases participants may have towards a real company (Newell & Shanks, 2004). The fictitious company is called Saint Story. It is a clothing brand with a recycling program that aims to protect nature from detrimental effects caused by the garment industry.

The idea of Saint Story is based on the company H&M. The corporate story of H&M is partly used to create the corporate story of Saint Story. Moreover, the experiment includes a CSR message about the Saint Story’s recycling program. This program is based on the garment collecting initiative of H&M. The numbers used in Saint Story’s corporate communication are from the actual H&M campaign, as well.

Table 3.1: The research conditions

| Research Condition | Level of Transparency | Type of Frame |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|
| Condition 1 | High | Corporate-praising |
| Condition 2 | Low | Corporate-praising |
| Condition 3 | High | Consumer-praising |
| Condition 4 | Low | Consumer-praising |

3.2. Research Sample

For this online research experiment, it was crucial all participants were able to understand English. There were no other inclusion criteria besides this. According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009), having representative samples is not crucial in most experiments. Based on this assumption, anyone who received the survey link to the online experiment could voluntarily participate in the experiment.

The participants were collected via convenience sampling, which belongs to the non-probability sampling method. This included inviting those participants that were easily accessible (Saunders et al., 2009). By inviting people randomly to participate, the study did not aim to draw statistical conclusions about the characteristics of the population (Saunders et al., 2009). Yet, there was a possibility to generalize the population based on the research findings due to the demographic survey questions. The sample gathering ended when the required number of cases ($N = 200$) was reached. However, since the partakers were included in the sample based on their reachability, some bias arose that went beyond the researcher’s control (Saunders et al., 2009). The researcher anticipated for potential biases before the survey was released to potential respondents. Therefore, it was attempted to at least gather a diverse set of participants with a variety in age and cultural background. Additionally, a large number of participants was approached in order to increase the level of

research quality. The goal of having a variety in age and cultural background was achieved (Appendix I). The ages of participants ranged from 19 years old to 76 years old ($M = 34.72$, $SD = 11.24$), and included a total of 40 different ages. Concerning the cultural background, 18 different nationalities participated in the survey ($M = 2.44$, $SD = 1.35$).

The research sample was gathered by using Amazon Mechanical Turk (<https://www.mturk.com>). This website gave access to many potential research participants across the world as it proved to be a convenient and fast way to retrieve data. The aim was to have at least 200 individual participating respondents. In this way, it was ensured that the target of 120 valid responses was reached after cleaning the data.

The aim of the sampling procedure was to gather at least 30 individual respondents per condition. In this particular case, there were four different conditions and so a total of 120 participants had to be gathered. In the end, a total of 200 respondents filled out the survey. After the data collection, the data was checked for biases and the level of reliability. One example of such bias is that some participants answered the survey questions rather quickly (e.g. 64 seconds). These participants were checked on whether they correctly answered the manipulation check questions or not. If not, they were excluded from the dataset. After this a reliability check was conducted. It appeared that other participants who answered the manipulation questions incorrectly negatively influenced the research reliability. Therefore, these respondents were removed from the dataset, which resulted in a final number of 152 participants ($N = 152$). After cleaning the data, the research results were reliable and significant.

3.3. Experiment Procedure

The online experiment was conducted by using the format of *Qualtrics* and was published on MTurk from the 7th of March until the 14th of March. At the start of the actual survey, the participants were shown an image of Saint Story's corporate website (Appendix II) and its corporate CSR advertisement to promote the recycling program (Appendix III), both in accordance with the four research conditions (corporate-praising vs. consumer-praising; and low transparency vs. high transparency). In regards to the corporate website image, it showed the company description of Saint Story, which was the same for every research condition. This was incorporated to introduce the brand to the participants. It gave for instance details on the target group, the clothing collections and the long-term goals. However, the description included information about the clothing recycling campaign as well, which was in accordance with the condition requirements as well and thus different per condition. Here for example, details were given on the CSR initiative, the goals and how customers can contribute.

The corporate CSR advertisements were all based on the different research conditions. Hence, these were all different except for the lay-out and color scheme. In respect to the corporate-praising framing condition, the CSR message focused on the good deeds that the company accomplishes by recycling the clothes from their customers. For example, the message stated that Saint Story's clothing recycling program has a positive effect on the environment. Furthermore, this message contained either a high level or low level of transparency, which will be explained more in-depth further down the text. With the consumer-praising framing condition, the CSR message referred to the good deed an individual could do for society and the environment by participating in the recycle program of Saint Story. For instance, the advertisements stated to the consumer that with every product they recycle at Saint Story, they contribute to a better environment. Hence, they are something good for nature by recycling clothes. Just like the corporate-praising message, the consumer-praising message was combined with either a low or high level of transparency.

A high transparency level was incorporated in the CSR advertisement by giving the participant exact details on the CSR efforts of Saint Story. These details included the starting date of the recycling campaign (2013), specific numbers on collected clothing so far (39.000 tonnes), and how much percentage of the sold clothing has been gathered since the start of the program (increasing from 11% to 31%). Furthermore, the recycle sign was included as well as the website link giving the opportunity to search for more information on the campaign. In comparison, the low level of transparency only demonstrated superficial details of Saint Story's CSR activities. The message did not include numbers, and solely a short description on the campaign without exact and transparent details. It stated that either Saint Story or the consumers, depending on the message frame, contribute to a cleaner environment.

To ensure the validity of the experimental design, the experiment and survey were pre-tested on five people varying in age. In this way, potential problems and unclear aspects of the survey were identified, such as the stimuli and questions. The received feedback was incorporated to improve the quality and validity of the survey for the actual research. Moreover, the research reliability was ensured by solely using measurement scales from prior research that conformed with Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha > 0.7$).

After improving the survey, it was released on the website of Mechanical Turk (Appendix IV). Here, the respondents were randomly exposed to one of the research conditions. After viewing the corporate story and CSR advertisement, they were asked to answer the survey questions and statements in relation to corporate citizenship, corporate reputation, behavioral intention, and personal-CSR fit.

3.4. Measurement

The experiment questions and statements were based on a 5-point Likert scale, which vary from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The survey included questions focusing on the corporate citizenship, the perceived corporate reputation, the purchase intention, and the personal-CSR fit. This order is used to provide specific details on the measurements.

3.4.1. Corporate Citizenship

The corporate citizenship was measured based on the RepTrak model research as well as the 2017 Global CSR RepTrak report (Reputation Institute, 2017b). The RepTrak model provided a reliable measurement scale, since the Reputation Institute conducts a comparable research every year since 1998 (Reputation Institute, 2017c). The RepTrak research measures the emotional connection of consumers to brands based on seven dimensions. Three of these dimensions measure the CSR perception of people, of which one was used in this study, namely corporate citizenship. The potential answers were based on the 5-point Likert scale and ranged from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. The question statements were as follows:

| Item | Statement: This company: |
|------|---|
| 1 | Has a positive influence on society |
| 2 | Acts responsibly to protect the environment |
| 3 | Supports good causes |

3.4.2. Corporate Reputation

In order to measure how the corporate reputation is perceived by the respondents, questions focused on the brand's trustworthiness, customer care, and value system. For statement 4, participants indicated an answer ranging from 1 meaning 'unfavorable' to 5 representing 'favorable'. For statement 5 to 7, the potential answers ranged from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. The perceived corporate reputation was measured through a set of questions based on measurements from Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, and Hill (2006). These researchers investigated the belief among consumers towards the company and connected this to credibility (Cronbach's $\alpha=.85$). The statements were as follows:

| Item | Statement: |
|------|--|
| 4 | The overall impression of this brand is (<i>Unfavorable-favorable</i>) |
| 5 | This is a firm I can trust |
| 6 | This is a firm that cares about its customers |
| 7 | This is a firm I believe in |

3.4.3. Behavioral Intention

The purchase intention of respondents was measured by asking one question, participants could choose an answer from the range 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. The purchase intention was measured based on measurements used by Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, and Hill (2006). These researchers investigated if participants would purchase products from the company used in the research, which was done through the statements on recommendation and purchase.

The following statement was included:

| Item | Statement: |
|------|-----------------------------|
| 8 | I would purchase this brand |

3.4.4. Personal-CSR Fit

With personal-CSR fit, respondents were asked questions on their opinions and feelings towards the environment, recycling and CSR. The measurements were a combination of questions set by Antil and Bennett (1979, in Bearden & Netemeyer, 2011a), and Antil (1984, in Bearden & Netemeyer, 2011b). These scientists focused their research on Socially Responsible Consumption Behavior (SRCB), whereby the SRCB is not only motivated by achieving personal goals, but by an interest in taking care of society as well. The statements are based on this source, and the Cronbach's alpha proved to be .92.

The following statements presented to the respondents were as follows:

| Item | Statement: |
|------|--|
| 9 | Every person should stop increasing their consumption of clothes so that our resources will last longer. |
| 10 | I don't think we're doing enough to encourage manufacturers to use recyclable materials. |
| 11 | Natural resources must be preserved even if people must do without some products. |
| 12 | All consumers should be interested in the environmental consequences of the products they purchase. |

| | |
|----|--|
| 13 | Pollution is personally affecting my life. |
| 14 | I have often thought that if we could just get by with a little less clothes there would be more left for future generations. |
| 15 | Manufacturers should be forced to use recycled materials in their manufacturing and processing operations. |
| 16 | I would be willing to stop buying clothes from companies guilty of polluting the environment even though it might be inconvenient. |

3.4.5. Manipulation Check

To be sure of the correct measurement of the independent variables, respondents were asked about the level of transparency and the type of framing based on the measurement of perceived motivation for participation by Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, & Hill (2006). The first statement provided an answer possibility based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. The second statement was multiple choice. The two manipulation checks were as follows:

| Item | Manipulation Check |
|------|--|
| 17 | Do you consider this advertisement to be highly transparent for providing information on the recycling program? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Strongly disagree b. Disagree c. Neither agree nor disagree d. Agree e. Strongly agree |
| 18 | In the advertisement, who is emphasized as the change maker of the campaign? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> f. The company g. You, yourself h. The employees i. The investors |

3.4.6. Demographic

To be able to recognize certain patterns among the population, the survey included questions on the personal demographics. The potential answers were either open or multiple-choice.

| Item | Manipulation Check |
|------|---|
| 19 | Please indicate your gender a. Male b. Female |
| 20 | How old are you? a. <i>Open</i> |
| 21 | What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? a. Less than high school b. High school c. Trade / Technical / Vocational training d. Bachelor's degree e. Master's degree f. Doctorate |
| 22 | What is your nationality? a. <i>Open</i> |

3.5. Data Analysis Process

In order to statistically analyze the collected data, the computer program IBM SPSS Statistics (version 24) was used. First, the data was discarded from incomplete and/or incorrect responses that negatively influenced the survey outcomes. From the initial 200 respondents, a final number of 152 participants ($N = 152$) were incorporated in for this research. As the research conditions were randomly assigned to participants, all conditions were supposed to have an equal number of participants. Nevertheless, due to the exclusion of 48 participants, the number of participants differs per research condition (table 3.2). Still, the minimum amount of 30 participants per research condition was achieved.

Table 3.2: Number of Participants per Research Condition

| Research Condition | Participants |
|--------------------|--------------|
| Condition 1 | 44 |
| Condition 2 | 34 |
| Condition 3 | 44 |
| Condition 4 | 30 |
| Total | 152 |

After the data cleaning process, the research reliability had to be checked before the hypotheses could be tested. In this way, the internal consistency per measurement was

certified. The reliability of the corporate citizenship measurement had a Cronbach's alpha of .83. Corporate reputation and personal-CSR fit had a Cronbach's alpha of .85 and .84, respectively. Based on these Cronbach's alpha outcomes ($\alpha > .7$), it was not necessary to remove any survey question.

Table 3.3: Cronbach's Alpha per Survey Topic

| Survey Chapter | Cronbach's Alpha |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Corporate Citizenship | .83 |
| Corporate Reputation | .85 |
| Personal-CSR fit | .84 |

The following step was to analyze the demographic results. To create a sense of structure within the demographical statistics, several adjustments were incorporated. Firstly, since the participants' ages ranged from 19 to 76, the age variable was divided into four categorical groups: young adults (18-30), Adults (31-50), Mid-seniors (51-70), and Seniors (70+). Secondly, there were eighteen different nationalities. Thirdly, the gender variable remained unchanged.

Within the research sample, the majority of the participants were male (60,5%). The age groups of young adults and adults were equal to each other, both 44,7%. Regarding nationality, most respondents were either American (40,1%) or Indian (32,9%). Finally, 63,8% of the participants had obtained a bachelor's degree.

Table 3.4: Overview of Sample Demographics

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent |
|-------------------------------|--|-----------|---------|---------------|
| Gender N = 152 | Male | 92 | 60.5 | 60.5 |
| | Female | 60 | 39.5 | 39.5 |
| Age N = 152 | Young adults (18-30) | 68 | 44.7 | 44.7 |
| | Adults (31-50) | 68 | 44.7 | 44.7 |
| | Mid-seniors (51-70) | 15 | 9.9 | 9.9 |
| | Seniors (70+) | 1 | .7 | .7 |
| Nationality N = 149 | 1 (American) | 61 | 40.1 | 40.9 |
| | 2 (Canadian) | 6 | 3.9 | 4.0 |
| | 3 (Indian) | 50 | 32.9 | 33.6 |
| | 4 (Other) | 20 | 13.2 | 13.4 |
| | 5 (Unknown) | 12 | 7.9 | 8.1 |
| Education N = 152 | High school | 20 | 13.2 | 13.2 |
| | Trade / Technical / Vocational training | 11 | 7.2 | 7.2 |
| | Bachelor's degree | 97 | 63.8 | 63.8 |
| | Master's degree | 23 | 15.1 | 15.1 |
| | Doctorate | 1 | .7 | .7 |

The correlation matrix presented in table 3.6 includes all variables and showed multiple significant correlations ($p < .05$ and $p < .01$). Three kinds of correlations were found that showed a significance of $p < .01$: moderate, positive correlations; weak, positive correlations; and weak, negative correlations. Firstly, a moderate, positive correlation was present between corporate citizenship and corporate reputation, between corporate citizenship and behavioral intention, and between corporate citizenship and personal-CSR fit. Moreover, a moderate, positive correlation was seen between corporate reputation and behavioral intention, and between corporate reputation and personal-CSR fit. Finally, a moderate, positive relation was found between behavioral intention and personal-CSR fit. The correlation matrix showed a weak, positive correlation as well between gender and age. Furthermore, there were also correlations identified, which showed a significance of $p < .05$. Weak, positive correlations were found between transparency and corporate reputation, between corporate reputation and gender, and finally, between behavioral intention and gender. Finally, the correlation matrix was used to foresee any potential collinearities among the independent variables. According to Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson and Tatham (2006, in Saunders et al., 2009), the presence of correlations of .90 and above indicates potential

collinearities. No correlations of .90 and higher are found in table 3.6. Therefore, the possibility of existing collinearities decreased.

Table 3.5: Mean and Standard Deviation of Independent, Dependent and Control Variables

| | M | SD |
|------------------------------|----------|-----------|
| Framing | .51 | .501 |
| Transparency | .58 | .495 |
| Corporate Citizenship | 4.23 | .652 |
| Corporate Reputation | 5.34 | .894 |
| Behavioral Intention | 3.95 | .864 |
| Personal-CSR fit | 9.97 | 1.918 |
| Gender | 1.39 | .490 |
| Age | 34.72 | 11.236 |

Table 3.6: Correlation Matrix of the Variables

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|--------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1 Framing | 1.000 | | | | | | | |
| 2 Transparency | -.031 | 1.000 | | | | | | |
| 3 Corporate Citizenship | .041 | .104 | 1.000 | | | | | |
| 4 Corporate Reputation | -.042 | .176* | .709** | 1.000 | | | | |
| 5 Behavioral Intention | -.129 | .156 | .446** | .680** | 1.000 | | | |
| 6 Personal-CSR Fit | -.067 | .060 | .406** | .433** | .517** | 1.000 | | |
| 7 Gender | -.102 | .089 | .135 | .189* | .200* | .080 | 1.000 | |
| 8 Age | -.008 | .072 | .055 | -.041 | -.081 | .023 | .275** | 1.000 |

Significance: ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Finally, after preparing the data for the analyses and gathering insights into the demographics of the sample, the actual hypotheses were tested. This was done by conducting one-way ANOVA tests and linear regression analyses. The ANOVA tests assessed the influence of the independent variables (type of framing and level of transparency) on one of the dependent variables (corporate citizenship, corporate reputation and personal-CSR fit). They compared the means within and between groups of data (Saunders et al., 2009). In this way, the main effects and interactions of message framing and transparency on corporate citizenship and corporate reputation were identified. Afterwards, a linear regression analysis was conducted. The regression test determined the “strength of a relationship between one dependent and one independent variable” (Saunders

et al., 2009, p. 451). More specifically, the relationships that were examined were between corporate citizenship and corporate reputation, between corporate reputation and behavioral intention, and finally, between CSR communication and corporate citizenship, which is influenced by the personal-CSR fit.

4. Results

In the following chapter, the research results will be discussed in-depth. At first, the reliability of this study is checked through the manipulation check. Thereafter, the different hypotheses are discussed based on their numerical order: H1 to H5. Within these chapters, the specific SPSS test is explained as well as the detailed results including tables. At the end of this chapter, a table is included presenting an overview of the accepted or rejected hypotheses.

4.1. Manipulation Check

As first step, the success of the manipulation was measured. Participants were asked if they had recognized the type of framing and the level of transparency they were exposed to. The success was measured by conducting a crosstabulation including the Chi-Square test. In regards to framing (corporate-praising vs. consumer-praising), the relationship between the presented type of framing and the respondents' answers was significant, $X^2 = (3, N = 152) = 16.51, p = .001$. So, participants who saw the advertisement with the corporate-praising frame correctly answered the manipulation check. This also applies to the participants who saw the advertisement with the consumer-praising frame. Hence, the framing manipulation correctly influenced the participants.

Secondly, to measure the success of the influence of transparency, a crosstabulation was conducted as well including the Chi-Square test. In this way, it was seen if participants who saw the high transparency advertisement scored higher to the manipulation question compared to the participants who saw the advertisement with low transparency. The relationship between the presented transparency level and the participants' answers was significant, $X^2 = (2, N = 152) = 26.12, p < .001$. So, the transparency manipulation of the conditions correctly influenced the participants.

4.2. The Influence of Corporate Citizenship on Corporate Reputation

To examine the impact of the perceived corporate citizenship on the corporate reputation, a univariate linear regression analysis was conducted. When this test was applied, no violation of the assumptions of multicollinearity, homoscedasticity, normality and linearity were found. Hair et al. (2006, in Saunders et al., 2009) recommend to use the tolerance value and variance inflation factor (VIF) to check for collinearity. A small tolerance value (.10 or below) or a large VIF (10 or above) refer to a high collinearity. For example, when analyzing the collinearity statistics of corporate citizenship, a tolerance value of .970 is found, and the VIF appears to be small, namely 1.030. These numbers show that there is no collinearity. Other independent variables did not show an existence of collinearity as well.

After the preliminary analysis, the model was found to be significant, $F(3, 148) = 54.29$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .52$. Moreover, corporate citizenship was found to have a clear impact on corporate reputation, ($\beta = .69$, $p < .001$). Therefore, H1 is accepted and hence, it is concluded that the perceived corporate citizenship has an influence on the corporate reputation. So, for example, when the corporate citizenship is positively perceived among consumers, the corporate reputation is likely to be good as well.

When looking into the effects of the control variables (gender, age), it is seen that gender had a significant effect on corporate reputation ($\beta = .13$, $p = .035$). Age showed a weak significant influence: ($\beta = -.12$, $p = .054$).

Table 4.1: Regression Analysis of Corporate Reputation for IV's and Control Variables

| | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|------|---------------------------|
| | B | SE | Beta |
| Constant | 1.281 | .366 | |
| Corporate Citizenship | .957*** | .078 | .698*** |
| Gender | .231** | .108 | .127** |
| Age | -.009* | .005 | -.115* |
| R^2 | .52 | | |
| F-Test | 54.29 | | |

Note: The dependent variable is Corporate Reputation.

Significance: *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < 0.1$

4.3. The Effect of Independent Variables

4.3.1. The Effect of Framing and Transparency on the Corporate Citizenship

To compare the influence of the different frames in combination with the different levels of transparency on the perceived corporate citizenship, the following hypotheses were posed: 1) The use of corporate-praising framing in CSR communication has a higher positive effect on the corporate citizenship compared to consumer-praising framing, and 2) the use of a high transparency level in CSR communication has a higher positive effect on corporate citizenship compared to the use of a low level of transparency. To gather data for these hypotheses, an ANOVA test was conducted in SPSS.

Firstly, the Levene's test was analyzed to ensure there was no heteroscedasticity (Saunders et al, 2009). There were no significant results, and thus, the variances for

corporate citizenship were found to be equal, $F(3,148) = 1.20$, $p = 0.311$. When looking at the results, the four different research conditions had a different influence on corporate citizenship. The use of corporate-praising framing in combination with a low level of transparency leads to a more positive perceived corporate citizenship ($M = 4.177$, $SD = .552$) compared to the use of consumer-praising framing combined with a low transparency level ($M = 4.122$, $SD = .597$). Moreover, the combination of corporate-praising frame with a high level of transparency creates a better perceived corporate citizenship ($M = 4.318$, $SD = .631$) compared to an advertisement with a consumer-praising frame and a high level of transparency ($M = 4.258$, $SD = .777$). Hence, the use of a corporate-praising frame creates a better corporate citizenship perception than the use of a consumer-praising frame. Additionally, it is concluded that when CSR advertisements contained a high level of transparency, the perceived corporate citizenship improved regardless which frame was incorporated.

However, even though there are differences regarding the means, the statistical test suggested no significant influence of either transparency [$F(1, 148) = 1.66$, $p = .20$, partial $\eta^2 = .011$] or framing [$F(1, 148) = .28$, $p = .59$, partial $\eta^2 = .002$]. Due to the lack of significance, H2a is not supported. Therefore, it cannot be confirmed that the use of corporate-praising framing has a higher positive effect on the corporate citizenship compared to the use of consumer-praising framing. Furthermore, the prediction of H3a cannot be confirmed. Thus, the use of a high transparency level in CSR communication does not have a significant positive effect on corporate citizenship compared to the use of a low transparency level.

Table 4.2: Means and Standard Deviation of Transparency and Framing on Corporate Citizenship

| | Corporate-praising frame | Consumer-praising frame |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| | Mean Standard Deviation | Mean Standard Deviation |
| Low Transparency | 4.177 .552 | 4.122 .597 |
| High Transparency | 4.318 .631 | 4.258 .777 |

Significance: *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < 0.1$

4.3.2. The Effect of Framing and Transparency on the Corporate Reputation

Similar to the previous paragraph, the influence of framing and transparency on corporate reputation was analyzed as well. Likewise, the output relied on an ANOVA Test. The Levene's test did not show significant values, and hence, the variances of corporate reputation were found to be equal, $F(3,148) = .68$, $p = 0.565$. When looking into the influence

of framing and transparency on the corporate reputation, it was concluded that the use of consumer-praising framing combined with a low level of transparency had a higher positive effect on corporate reputation ($M = 5.211$, $SD = 1.023$) compared to the inclusion of corporate-praising framing combined with a low transparency level ($M = 5.098$, $SD = .997$). Furthermore, the consumer-praising framing in combination with a high level of transparency still showed a higher positive impact on corporate reputation ($M = 5.485$, $SD = .792$) compared to the corporate-praising framing in combination with a high transparency level ($M = 5.455$, $SD = .788$). Therefore, based on the means, it is concluded that the use of a consumer-praising frame had a higher positive effect on corporate reputation compared to the use of a corporate-praising frame. In addition, regardless which frame is incorporated in an advertisement, the use of a high level of transparency contributes to a better corporate reputation.

When looking into the statistical significance of the test, it is concluded that the results are not significant regarding the framing variable [$F(1, 148) = .24$, $p = .62$, partial $\eta^2 = .002$]. Despite the predicted difference, H2b cannot be confirmed, and hence, the use of the corporate-praising frame does not lead to a better perceived corporate reputation compared to the use of the consumer-praising frame. However, the output suggested that the variable of transparency had a significant effect [$F(1, 148) = 4.65$, $p = .03$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$]. Therefore, H3b is accepted and it is confirmed that the use of a high transparency level in CSR communication has a higher positive effect on corporate reputation compared to the use of a low level of transparency.

Table 4.3: Means and Standard Deviation of Transparency and Framing on Corporate Reputation

| | Corporate-praising frame | Consumer-praising frame |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| | Mean Standard Deviation | Mean Standard Deviation |
| Low Transparency | 5.098 .997 | 5.211 1.023 |
| High Transparency | 5.455 .788** | 5.485 .792** |

Significance: *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < 0.1$

4.4. The Influence of Corporate Reputation on Behavioral Intention

To identify if corporate reputation has a positive effect on the behavioral intention of consumers, a linear regression analysis was conducted. Prior to this analysis, no violation of the assumptions of multicollinearity, homoscedasticity, normality and linearity were found. The independent variables all showed tolerances values higher than .10 and VIF values

smaller than 10 (Hair et al., 2006, in Saunders et al., 2009). For example, corporate reputation had a tolerance value of .905 and a VIF value of 1.104.

It is concluded that this model was significant, $F(3, 148) = 44.41, p < .001, R^2 = .47$. A clear impact of corporate reputation on behavioral intention was present, ($\beta = .66, p < .001$). Hence, the prediction of H4 is accepted meaning that corporate reputation has a positive effect on the purchase behavior of consumers. When looking more closely into the influence of the control variables, both gender and age had no significant effect: ($\beta = .09, p = .129$) and ($\beta = -.08, p = .201$), respectively.

In conclusion, it can be stated that a well-perceived corporate reputation has a positive mediation effect between the perceived corporate citizenship and the behavioral intention of consumers. In other words, a good corporate reputation, which is partially based on good corporate citizenship, stimulates consumers to purchase products and/or services of a company.

Table 4.4: Regression Analysis of Behavioral Intention for IV's and Control Variables

| | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|------|---------------------------|
| | B | SE | Beta |
| Constant | .536 | .358 | |
| Corporate Reputation | .636*** | .059 | .659*** |
| Gender | .171 | .112 | .097 |
| Age | -.006 | .005 | -.080 |
| R^2 | .47 | | |
| F-Test | 44.41 | | |

Note: The dependent variable is Behavioral Intention

Significance: *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < 0.1$

4.5. The Influence of Personal CSR-Fit on the Connection between CSR Communication and Corporate Citizenship

To determine the moderation effect of the personal-CSR fit of consumers on the relationship between CSR communication and corporate citizenship, a linear regression analysis was conducted. The preliminary analyses showed no violation of the assumptions of multicollinearity, homoscedasticity, normality and linearity were found. The independent variables all showed tolerances values higher than .10 and VIF values smaller than 10 (Hair

et al., 2006, in Saunders et al., 2009). For example, here personal-CSR fit had a tolerance value of .832 and a VIF value of 1.201.

Thereafter, the model was found to be significant, $F(5, 146) = 6.76, p < .001, R^2 = .19$. The personal-CSR fit showed a significant influence on the relationship between the corporate CSR communication and the perceived corporate citizenship, ($\beta = .37, p < .001$). Therefore, the prediction in H5 is supported, and hence, the personal-CSR fit moderates the relationship of CSR communication and corporate citizenship. A high personal fit enhances the relationship while a low personal fit weakens the relationship.

Moreover, when looking to the moderation effect of personal-CSR fit in interaction with framing, there was no significant effect, ($\beta = .08, p = .273$). Likewise, the moderation effect of personal-CSR fit with transparency appeared to have no significant effect, ($\beta = .08, p = .305$). In regards to the influence of the control variables, gender and age were not significant, ($\beta = .01, p = .202$) and ($\beta = .02, p = .846$), respectively.

Table 4.5: Regression Analysis of Corporate Citizenship for IV's and Control Variables

| | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|------|---------------------------|
| | B | SE | Beta |
| Constant | 2.663 | .310 | |
| Personal_Fit | .124*** | .027 | .365*** |
| Personal_FitXFraming | .011 | .010 | .083 |
| Personal_FitXTransparency | .010 | .010 | .081 |
| Gender | .134 | .105 | .101 |
| Age | -.001 | .005 | 0.15 |
| R^2 | .188 | | |
| F-Test | 6.76 | | |

Note: The dependent variable is Corporate Citizenship.

Significance: *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < 0.1$

4.6. Summary

Table 4.6: Overview of Hypotheses

| Hypotheses | Accept or Reject |
|--|------------------|
| H1: A positive perception on corporate citizenship by consumers has a positive impact on corporate reputation. | Accept |
| H2a: The use of corporate-praising framing in CSR communication has a higher positive effect on the corporate citizenship compared to consumer-praising framing. | Reject |
| H2b: The use of corporate-praising framing in CSR communication has a higher positive effect on the corporate reputation compared to consumer-praising framing. | Reject |
| H3a: The use of a high transparency level in CSR communication has a higher positive effect on corporate citizenship compared to the use of a low level of transparency. | Reject |
| H3b: The use of a high transparency level in CSR communication has a higher positive effect on corporate reputation compared to the use of a low level of transparency. | Accept |
| H4: The corporate reputation has a positive effect on the behavioral intention of consumers. | Accept |
| H5: Personal-CSR fit moderates the relationship of CSR communication and corporate citizenship: A high fit enhances this relationship while a low fit weakens this relationship. | Accept |

5. Discussion

Over the past years, CSR communication has come to play a bigger role in the corporate communication strategy, as it proved to be a good tool to enhance the corporate reputation. Therefore, this current research tried to gain more understanding of the influence of CSR communication on the consumers' perception. More specifically, it aimed to discover how the incorporation of different types of framing and varying levels of transparency in CSR communication can have different influences on consumers' perceptions towards corporate citizenship and corporate reputation. Moreover, it was examined how corporate reputation may influence the behavioral intention of consumers. The following paragraph presents the main findings based on the literature framework and the results. This is done in accordance to the hypotheses' order (H1 to H5). Thereafter, the research implications are discussed followed by the managerial implications.

5.1. Main Findings

5.1.1. Hypotheses Testing

One aspect influencing the corporate reputation is the perception consumers have on the organizational CSR efforts (Reputation Institute, 2017b). The perception is based on personal judgment and whether the stakeholders' CSR expectations are met or not. By fulfilling the stakeholders' expectations, companies are able to acquire a good corporate reputation. Therefore, the corporate citizenship is argued to be a deterministic factor of corporate reputation (Siltaoja, 2006). In accordance with the studied literature (Schnietz & Epstein, 2005; Siltaoja, 2006), the research results indicated that a positive consumer perception on the corporate citizenship has a positive effect on the corporate reputation.

When looking more closely to the impact of CSR communication on consumers, research by Kouchaki and Jami (2016a; 2016b) suggested that the use of communication framing influences the consumer perception and behavior. Their research incorporated two different types of frames: corporate-praising framing and consumer-praising framing. H2a and H2b posed that the use of corporate-praising framing in CSR communication has a higher positive effect on corporate citizenship and corporate reputation compared to the use of consumer-praising framing. Nevertheless, no significant prove was found for these statements, which contradicts to the conclusions of Kouchaki and Jami (2016b), and Berens and Popma (2014). Still, the means indicated that the corporate-praising frame creates a higher positive perception on the corporate citizenship, whereas the consumer-praising frame creates a higher positive perception on the corporate reputation. An explanation for this difference in the influence of the frames may be the individualistic preference of

consumers for corporate CSR practices. When consumers support corporate social efforts and prefer companies that do good, they may be more sensitive to CSR communication that present CSR practices from a corporate point of view. This is in line with the findings of Berens and Popma (2014). On the other hand, consumers who do not have a high interest in CSR may not base their perception on CSR communication and corporate citizenship, yet rather on the corporate reputation as a whole. Kouchaki and Jami (2016b) stated that the consumer-praising frame makes consumers feel good. Therefore, it is thought that such CSR communication will appeal more to consumers who are less interested in CSR, which may be beneficial for the overall corporate reputation. Hence, it is considered that the personal-CSR fit plays a determining role in the perception on corporate citizenship and corporate reputation. Consequently, this may explain the difference in influence by the corporate-praising framing and consumer-praising framing on corporate citizenship and corporate reputation.

Thirdly, literature suggested that transparent communication is key for maintaining and strengthening the corporate reputation (Bentele & Nothhaft, 2011; Ihlen, 2011; Stoker, 2016). However, just like the influence of message framing, the influence of transparency on the corporate citizenship and the corporate reputation has not been research extensively until now (Luna Sotorrío, 2018). H3a and H3b posed that the use of a high transparency level in CSR communication has a higher positive effect on corporate citizenship and corporate reputation compared to the use of a low level of transparency. This research did not show a significant effect of the incorporation of transparency on the perceived corporate citizenship and hence, not confirming H3a. An explanation may be that the defining of high transparency is an individualistic judgment and people are likely to perceive a high transparency level in different ways, which causes an irregularity among participants' answers. Nevertheless, the means showed that high transparency had a higher mean compared to low transparency. This indicates that high transparency has a more positive impact on corporate citizenship compared to low transparency. Yet, because of the insignificant influence in this research, more research is required into this field. Moreover, in line with literature (Nothele & Nothhaft, 2011; Ihlen, 2011), current research confirmed the prediction of H3b, and thus showing that the use of high level transparency has a positive effect on the corporate reputation. Thereupon, it is established that the incorporation of transparency into the CSR communication is beneficial for the corporate reputation enhancement.

H4 predicted that the corporate reputation would have a positive effect on the behavioral intention of consumers. If consumers consider a company to have a good reputation, they are more likely to purchase from this company compared to a company with a bad reputation. In accordance with literature (Jung & Seock, 2016; Lee et al., 2012; Sicilia et al., 2006; Wahid & Ahmed, 2011; Wu & Lo, 2009), the prediction of H4 was confirmed in

this study. Therefore, it is concluded that a good corporate reputation positively stimulates the behavioral intention of consumers.

Finally, Honkanen et al. (2004) and Fraj and Martinez (2006) argued that the individual values and lifestyles of consumers influences their opinion towards the CSR efforts of an organization. Therefore, this research aspired to find out if the personal-CSR fit of consumers influences the relationship between CSR communication and corporate citizenship. If consumers show a high interest in CSR, they intend to have a better perception on corporate citizenship in comparison to consumers who have little interest in CSR. Simultaneously, if consumers do not think the corporate social actions are important, they intend to have a less positive perception on corporate citizenship. Hence, H5 posed the following: personal-CSR fit moderates the relationship of CSR communication and corporate citizenship. A high fit will enhance this relationship while a low fit weakens this relationship. Research results confirmed that the personal-CSR fit does have a moderation effect on the perceived corporate citizenship. Therefore, it is acknowledged that a high fit will benefit the corporate citizenship, while a low fit will not have this stimulating effect.

Below, a visual overview is presented on the supported and reject hypotheses. The green color represents the accepted hypotheses, while the red color represents the rejected hypotheses.

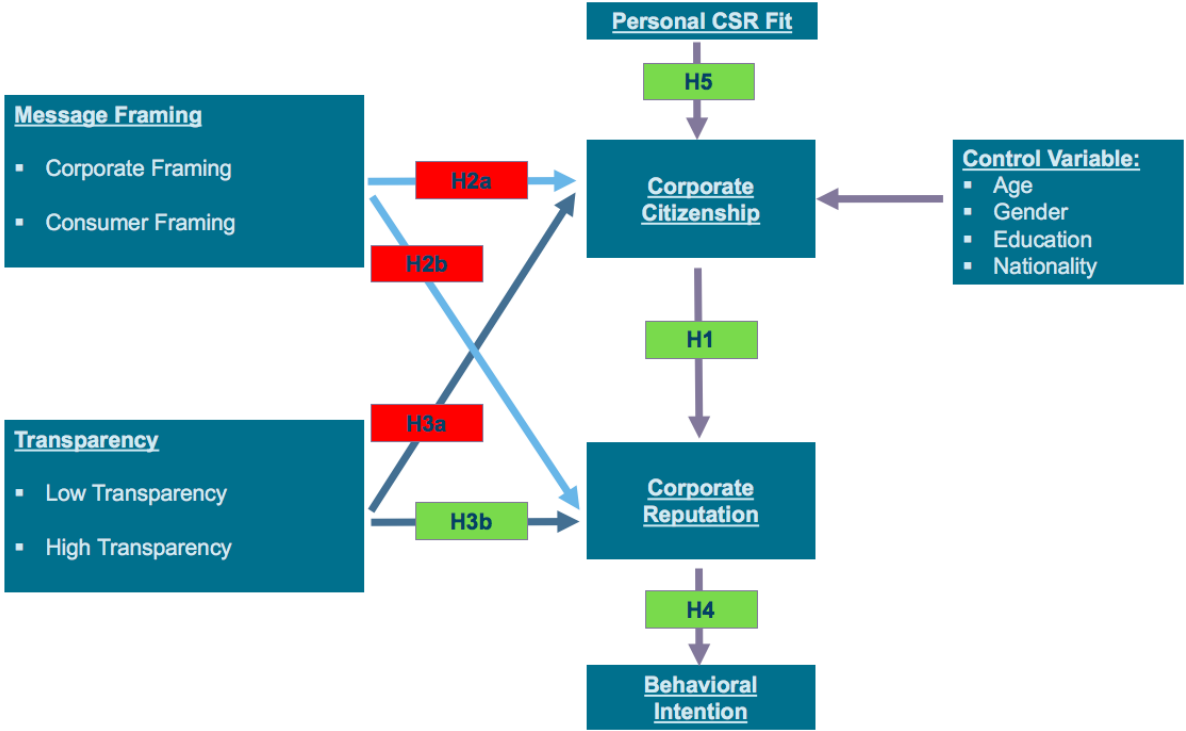


Figure 5.1: Overview of the Conceptual Model

5.1.2. Influence of Gender & Age

Besides investigating the effect of the dependent and independent variables, the influence of gender and age (control variables) on the dependent variables was analyzed as well. Age appeared to have no significant influence on the dependent variables (corporate citizenship, corporate reputation and behavioral intention). There may be multiple reasons why this variable did not show a significant effect on each of the dependent variables. One explanation could be there was an insufficient number of participants to measure a significant effect. At the moment, respondents seem to be divided within their age groups (young adults; adults; mid-seniors; and seniors). This may cause that no significant conclusions can be drawn. The participants' ages ranged from 19 to 76 years. Yet, people older than 30 years did not experience a higher personal fit to CSR than people younger than 30 years.

Further, gender did have a significant impact on the corporate reputation and behavioral intention. Hence the gender of an individual determines how he/she perceives the corporate reputation and how this influences the behavioral intention. According to Walsh, Schaarschmidt and Ivens (2017), gender is an influencing factor, and should be therefore considered by fashion companies when creating advertisements that enhance the corporate reputation. For instance, research showed that women tend to spend a longer period of time seeking for information in comparison to men before purchasing a product (Jackson, Stoel & Brantley, 2011). It is assumed they consider the corporate reputation amongst others. Hence, it is considered that women tend to be more sensitive for corporate reputations compared to men.

Besides the influence of gender on corporate reputation and behavioral intention, the variable did not have a significant influence on perceived corporate citizenship. An explanation could be that corporate citizenship is a rather new topic to people. Simultaneously, the perceived corporate citizenship is based on the personal opinion towards CSR, the personal-CSR fit. Because corporate citizenship is a new phenomenon and depends on a personal perception, it could be a reason why participants show different opinions within their gender groups.

5.2. Theoretical Implications

Overall, this research contributed to existing academic research in multiple ways. Firstly, this research adds value to the existing literature by gathering more knowledge about the use of message framing in CSR communication. To date, literature focusing on the use of corporate-praising framing and consumer-praising framing in CSR communication is limited. Therefore, the research framework concerning communication framing relied heavily on the researches of Kouchaki and Jami (2016a; 2016b) and of Berens and Popma (2014).

Kouchaki and Jami (2016a; 2016b) underlined the positive effect of corporate-praising framing on the individual consumer behavior in the field of corporate social marketing. Based on this knowledge, it was assumed that using a corporate-praising frame in CSR communication would also have a positive effect on corporate citizenship, corporate reputation and behavioral intention in comparison to a consumer-praising frame. Yet, this research revealed that this assumption cannot be taken as a certainty since no significant effect was found. It only showed initial evidence of the positive effect of corporate-praising framing on companies' reputation and consumers' purchase intention. This adds new value to the existing literature concerning CSR communications and message framing.

This research also contributes to research concerning the use of transparency in CSR communication. Literature showed that transparency is likely to increase the stakeholder trust, which strengthens the consumer-company relationship (Bentele & Nothhaft, 2011; Ihlen, 2011; Stoker, 2016). In effect, the corporate reputation may improve. It was therefore argued that including a high level of transparency in CSR communication would have a positive effect on corporate citizenship and corporate reputation. Nevertheless, no significant effect was found on corporate citizenship. One explanation is that the investigation on perceived corporate citizenship is a new subject in the field of corporate reputation, which resulted in limited available literature. Another reason may be that CSR efforts rarely satisfy consumers, according to Lee et al. (2012). It is therefore considered that communicating about social actions openly is not enough to meet the expectations of all stakeholders. Which CSR activities are presented as well as the way they are presented seem to matter as well, which could have affected this current study. Nevertheless, the use of a high transparency level did have a positive effect on corporate reputation. This underlines the benefit of communicating corporate CSR efforts in a transparent manner. As result, this finding proved to be in line with existing literature and therefore adds value to the research of Bentele and Nothhaft (2011), Ihlen (2011) and May (2006, in Ihlen, May & Bartlett, 2014).

Furthermore, this research adds value to existing literature on the influence of corporate citizenship on corporate reputation. Two existing literature conclusions played a crucial role: having a reputation for corporate social responsibility protects companies in the finance industry during crises and the connection between perceived corporate citizenship and corporate reputation is depended on consumers' personal values, for example the personal-CSR fit (Schnietz & Epstein, 2005; Siltaoja, 2006). Based on this knowledge, it was argued that consumers who have a positive perception on corporate citizenship would have a positive perception on the corporate reputation. This study confirmed this relationship between perceived corporate citizenship and corporate reputation. Prior research focused on companies in the financial sector, yet this study acknowledges that corporate citizenship can

play a key role in the enhancement of corporate reputation of companies in the fashion industry, and thereby adding value to existing literature in the field of corporate reputation.

Finally, this research contributes to research focusing the influence of corporate reputation on behavioral intention. Prior research focused on the business-to-business (B2B) environment and found an existing relationship between corporate reputation and behavioral intention (Key & Xie, 2009). This study focused on the business-to-consumer (B2C) area and found here a positive relationship as well. Thus, consumers who have a positive perception towards a company tend to have a high purchase intention. This contributes to the research of Becker et al. (2006) who stated that consumers reward a company for its social efforts through their purchase intention.

5.3. Managerial Implications

This study offers valuable managerial implications concerning corporate citizenship, corporate reputation and behavioral intention. In general, a well-perceived corporate citizenship is able to enhance the corporate reputation, and consequently, a good corporate reputation is characterized by stimulating the behavioral intention of consumers. When consumers' purchasing intentions are positively stimulated, the sales are likely to go up, which leads to an increase in the bottom line and strengthens the corporate market position.

Firstly, it is important organizations are aware of two aspects when choosing CSR efforts they would like to engage with, namely the industry they are in as well as the expectations of their external and internal stakeholders. Firstly, companies should consider if their CSR actions and CSR communication fit to the industry they are in, since stakeholders will have an opinion about this fit. Consequently, the stakeholders' opinions will influence the corporate reputation, and logically, companies aim to enhance this reputation. Therefore, the stakeholders should have a positive attitude towards the fit between a company's industry and their CSR activities. According to Lee et al. (2012), incorporating thoughtful CSR activities can create a long-term consumer-company relationship, leading up to long-term profit. For example, for a clothing company like H&M, which finds itself in the fashion industry, it makes sense to implement CSR efforts related to clothes. For instance, a clothing recycling program. This is likely to be seen as a logical fit by stakeholders. If H&M would set up a sport program for people with obesity, stakeholders may get confused and find this a strange fit, since H&M is linked to clothing and not to sports or health. This could raise critique and negatively affect the corporate reputation.

Secondly, when considering the stakeholders, companies should specifically investigate who their stakeholders are: for example, their age, gender and whether they show an interest in the corporate social responsibility or not. This study revealed that people

who have a high personal-CSR fit are likely to appreciate a brand practicing CSR more than people with a low personal-CSR fit. Therefore, it is recommended to conduct a stakeholder research (external and internal), which may identify specific, yet helpful stakeholder details. These findings will help companies to understand whether their stakeholders are interested in CSR actions or not. When stakeholders show interest in CSR, companies can develop suitable CSR programs and a CSR communication strategy. Moreover, by understanding the stakeholders' interest and values, companies can customize the CSR efforts and CSR communication. This will be beneficial for the customer-company relationship, because stakeholders will be able to identify themselves in the organization, which will enhance the corporate reputation. In addition, by investing in and promoting the CSR efforts, a competitive advantage may be created and increase the bottom line (Lee et al., 2012). The profit can be invested in the growth of the company and the expansion of social efforts. On the other hand, if stakeholders appear to have little to no interest in CSR, companies should carefully consider if it is worthwhile to invest in CSR activities and CSR communication. It could be that the social efforts and communicating about them will not deliver what companies hope for: an improved corporate reputation and an increase in profit.

Moreover, fashion companies are encouraged to communicate clearly and in a transparent manner about their CSR activities. On the one hand, companies can explain why they conduct certain CSR practices. On the other hand, through transparent communication they can promote the cause and stimulate positive stakeholders attitudes. Both existing literature and this study showed the ability of transparent communication to strengthen the corporate reputation. As influencing factor, transparent communication is able to decrease consumer uncertainties towards organizations and increase consumer trust (Baraibar-Diez & Luna Sotorrío, 2018). Therefore, transparency plays a mediating role between CSR efforts and corporate reputation. It is hence recommended to companies in the fashion industry to integrate transparency as mediator into the CSR communication strategy. The higher the transparency level in a CSR advertisement, the more positive the corporate reputation is perceived by consumers. Consequently, a strong corporate reputation will positively affect the purchase behavior of consumers and increase the bottom line.

Finally, it is acknowledged that currently CSR is getting more common to integrate it in companies and communicate about it. Yet not all companies in the fashion industry have incorporated CSR into their businesses until now. To these companies, it is recommended to evaluate their corporate values, mission and their industry, and to research their stakeholders. In this way, they can explore if CSR practices suit their business and which CSR activities they could get involved with. It is crucial to stay true to the corporate ideologies and goals in order to maintain and enhance the corporate reputation. Simultaneously, CSR has become a popular and important topic in today's society, and has

become a tool to attract customers. Therefore, fashion companies are encouraged to start integrating CSR into their business even though there are signs that the industry or the stakeholders do not fully support it yet. In the end, maintaining and enhancing the corporate reputation, increasing the number of served consumers, and increasing the bottom line is essential for the survival of businesses. CSR and CSR communication could be the perfect tools to ensure long-term continuation.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Conclusion of Research Question

This study aspired to explore the influence of CSR communication on the perceived corporate citizenship, the corporate reputation and the behavioral intention of consumers. Therefore, the following research question was posed: *“What is the influence of framing (corporate-praising vs. consumer-praising) and transparency (high vs. low) in CSR communication on the corporate citizenship, the corporate reputation and the behavioral intention of consumers?”*

As the research question reveals, the CSR communication used in this experimental study incorporated either the corporate-praising frame or the consumer-praising frame, and either a high level of transparency or a low level of transparency. By combining these elements, four research conditions were created. These were incorporated in the online experiment as four different types of CSR advertisements, which promoted the clothing recycling program developed by the fictitious brand Saint Story. Due to the different advertisements, the respondents' behavior towards one treatment were compared to the behavior of others with another treatment. This made it possible to answer the central research question and make the following statements.

Before conducting the actual research, it was expected that the corporate-praising frame would produce a positive effect on corporate citizenship and corporate reputation. Nevertheless, the output did not show a significant influence of the use of the corporate-praising frame in CSR communication on corporate citizenship nor corporate reputation. Furthermore, this study assumed that the use of a high transparency level would lead to a positive effect on corporate citizenship and corporate reputation. No significant effect was found on corporate citizenship. However, the use of transparency did have an effect on the corporate reputation. This finding reveals that the incorporation of transparency in the CSR communication is beneficial to maintain and strengthen the corporate reputation. Thirdly, it was found that CSR communication does have an indirect influence on the behavioral intention provided that the CSR communication is able to strengthen the consumers' perception on corporate citizenship and corporate reputation. Consequently, a strong corporate citizenship and corporate reputation will lead to a favorable behavioral intention. Finally, this research took into account the moderation effect of the individual's personal-CSR fit, which referred to the congruence between the corporate social efforts and the lifestyle and values of consumers. It was found that when consumers show a high personal-CSR fit, they have a more positive corporate citizenship perception compared to consumers who show a low personal-CSR fit.

All in all, this research finds support for four hypotheses out of seven. On the one hand, the supported hypotheses provide more academic knowledge on the topic, but also indicate the existence of research limitations. Hence, the following chapter discusses the research limitations and provides suggestions for future research.

6.2. Limitations & Future Research

When evaluating this research, several research restraints are identified. These limitations have affected the research in either a small or great extent. With each presented limitation, a recommendation will be given for future research. In this way, future studies can take these limitations and recommendations into account and prevent similar situations from occurring.

The first limitation that is recognized is the amount of existing literature on 'corporate-praising framing' and 'consumer-praising framing'. This current research relied in great amount on the research of Kouchaki & Jami. The limited number of existing research made it more difficult to draw precise conclusions on this topic. Moreover, even though literature argued that corporate-praising framing would have a higher positive effect on corporate citizenship and corporate reputation (Berens & Popma, 2014; Kouchaki & Jami, 2016b), this research was unable to certify this assumption. The contradiction between existing literature and the current study results demonstrate the need for more research. It is therefore highly recommended to conduct more research into the influence of these two frames on corporate citizenship and corporate reputation. Moreover, future research should further address the difference in influence of corporate-praising framing and consumer-praising framing on companies' reputations in different kinds of industries. At the moment, the study only focused on the fashion industry, which makes it less appropriate to provide the recommendations to companies from other types of industry. In addition, it could also be that for one industry the consumer-praising frame creates a more positive effect, whereas another industry may benefit more from the corporate-praising frame. This would make it possible to provide customized recommendations to different companies.

The second limitation concerns the size of the research sample ($N = 152$). The influence of age, framing and transparency (except for its influence on corporate reputation) appeared to be insignificant, potentially because of the small number of participants. The research results indicated a division among the participants. For example, the age ranged from 19 to 76 creating a difficulty to draw significant conclusions on the impact of age on the dependent variables. Moreover, in regards to transparency, it is considered that all participants had a different perception on the meaning of low and high transparency. This may have caused an irregularity within the research data. In order to get a more reliable view on how people perceive the influence of either high or low transparency, the research sample

is recommended to be bigger in future research. Another suggestion is to conduct a separate research on the perception of people towards the different levels of transparency. In this way, it can be established what high and/or low transparency mean and look like in CSR communication. Consequently, these outcomes could be used for further research.

Furthermore, as future recommendation, it is suggested to conduct more research into personal-CSR fit. Even though the mediation role of personal-CSR fit was established between CSR communication and corporate citizenship, it is unknown which exact personal values and lifestyles affect the perceived corporate citizenship. For a better understanding of the relationship between the values and lifestyles of consumers and consumer perception on corporate citizenship, a specific overview on the values and lifestyles is recommended to be set up.

Finally, this study used the method of online experiment to gain more understanding on the influence of framed and transparent CSR communication on corporate citizenship and corporate reputation. One of the advantages is the ability to control the conditions of the experiment as well as the sampling procedure. This type of control increases the internal validity (Saunders et al., 2009). However, one of the disadvantages of this method is the low level of external validity (Saunders et al., 2009). This is because, there is no control over in which setting and at what time the participants filled out the survey. Moreover, an online experiment is less comparable to a real-life situation. In the experiment, participants are shown a webpage and a CSR advertisement from the fictitious company Saint Story. The webpage was a screenshot of the corporate description on the official Saint Story website. Yet, it was one picture that did not allow people to scroll over the webpage, which can be done in real-life. In addition, the CSR advertisement was included as a Facebook status update. Yet participants could only see the post and not an entire Facebook timeline, which would be the case when using Facebook. So, this experiment was different from reality. Therefore, it is recommended that future research takes the low level of external validity into account and maybe choose another method to conduct a similar study. In this way, conclusions can be drawn based on more real-life situations.

7. References

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Appendix I – Participants’ Age & Cultural Background

Appendix A1: Age Overview of Participants

| Age | Frequency |
|--------------|------------|
| 19,00 | 1 |
| 20,00 | 1 |
| 22,00 | 4 |
| 23,00 | 11 |
| 24,00 | 9 |
| 25,00 | 6 |
| 26,00 | 7 |
| 27,00 | 14 |
| 28,00 | 4 |
| 29,00 | 3 |
| 30,00 | 8 |
| 31,00 | 3 |
| 32,00 | 6 |
| 33,00 | 7 |
| 34,00 | 7 |
| 35,00 | 4 |
| 36,00 | 4 |
| 37,00 | 5 |
| 38,00 | 7 |
| 39,00 | 5 |
| Total | 116 |

| Age | Frequency |
|--------------|-----------|
| 40,00 | 3 |
| 42,00 | 3 |
| 44,00 | 1 |
| 45,00 | 4 |
| 46,00 | 3 |
| 47,00 | 4 |
| 48,00 | 1 |
| 49,00 | 1 |
| 52,00 | 1 |
| 53,00 | 1 |
| 54,00 | 1 |
| 55,00 | 1 |
| 56,00 | 2 |
| 57,00 | 3 |
| 59,00 | 1 |
| 62,00 | 1 |
| 63,00 | 1 |
| 64,00 | 1 |
| 67,00 | 2 |
| 76,00 | 1 |
| Total | 36 |

In total there are 40 different ages.

Appendix A2: Cultural Background Overview of Participants

| Nationality | Frequency |
|----------------|-----------|
| Algerian | 1 |
| American | 61 |
| Asian-American | 1 |
| Bangladeshi | 1 |
| Brazilian | 1 |
| British | 4 |
| Canadian | 6 |
| Croat | 1 |
| Dutch | 1 |
| Emirati | 1 |
| Total | 78 |

| Nationality | Frequency |
|--------------|-----------|
| French | 1 |
| Indian | 50 |
| Indonesian | 1 |
| Irish | 1 |
| Italian | 1 |
| Jamaican | 1 |
| Nigerian | 2 |
| Venezuelan | 2 |
| Unknown | 15 |
| Missing | 3 |
| Total | 74 |

In total there are 18 different nationalities, and there is one category of which the nationalities were unknown. This group is referred to as ‘unknown’.

Appendix II – Corporate Description

Condition 1: Corporate-praising X High transparency

Home Collection About Us Contact FAQ 



Saint Story

ABOUT US

Saint Story is a global fashion and design company that embodies a classic style and effortless cool.

Since the invention in 1947, Saint Story offers fashion and quality at the best price in a sustainable way for women, men, teenagers and children. The collections include everything from sparkling gala outfits and exclusive designer collaborations to everyday basics and high-performance sportswear to help fashion fans across the world dress their personal style. Our long-term goal is to make sustainable, good-quality fashion accessible to as many people as possible.

We believe fashion is far too precious to end up in landfills. That is why in 2013, we launched our Saint Story recycling program initiative worldwide. It is possible to drop off any textile - no matter brand or condition - in all our Saint Story stores across the globe. In this way, our initiative gives clothes a second chance. By 2030, we want 100% of our sold Saint Story clothes to be recycled.



Condition 2: Corporate-praising X Low transparency

Home Collection About Us Contact FAQ 



Saint Story

ABOUT US

Saint Story is a global fashion and design company that embodies a classic style and effortless cool.

Since the invention in 1947, Saint Story offers fashion and quality at the best price in a sustainable way for women, men, teenagers and children. The collections include everything from sparkling gala outfits and exclusive designer collaborations to everyday basics and high-performance sportswear to help fashion fans across the world dress their personal style. Our long-term goal is to make sustainable, good-quality fashion accessible to as many people as possible.

We believe fashion is far too precious to end up in landfills. That is why we launched our Saint Story recycling program initiative. It is possible to drop off any textile - no matter brand or condition - in all our Saint Story stores.



Condition 3: Consumer-praising X High transparency

[Home](#) [Collection](#) [About Us](#) [Contact](#) [FAQ](#) 



Saint Story

ABOUT US

Saint Story is a global fashion and design company that embodies a classic style and effortless cool.

Since the invention in 1947, Saint Story offers fashion and quality at the best price in a sustainable way for women, men, teenagers and children. The collections include everything from sparkling gala outfits and exclusive designer collaborations to everyday basics and high-performance sportswear to help fashion fans across the world dress their personal style. Our long-term goal is to make sustainable, good-quality fashion accessible to as many people as possible.

We believe fashion is far too precious to end up in landfills. That is why in 2013, we launched Saint Story's recycling program initiative worldwide. You can drop off your textiles - no matter brand or condition - in all our Saint Story stores across the globe. In this way, you give your clothes a second chance. By 2030, 100% of your bought Saint Story clothes could be part of the recycling program.



Condition 4: Consumer-praising X Low transparency

[Home](#) [Collection](#) [About Us](#) [Contact](#) [FAQ](#) 



Saint Story

ABOUT US

Saint Story is a global fashion and design company that embodies a classic style and effortless cool.

Since the invention in 1947, Saint Story offers fashion and quality at the best price in a sustainable way for women, men, teenagers and children. The collections include everything from sparkling gala outfits and exclusive designer collaborations to everyday basics and high-performance sportswear to help fashion fans across the world dress their personal style. Our long-term goal is to make sustainable, good-quality fashion accessible to as many people as possible.

We believe fashion is far too precious to end up in landfills. That is why, we launched our Saint Story recycling program initiative. You can drop off your textiles - no matter brand or condition - in all our Saint Story stores.



Appendix III - CSR Advertisements

Condition 1: Corporate-praising X High transparency

Saint Story
Yesterday at 3:30pm ·

Recycle Clothes
Saint Story's recycling program ensures that every piece of clothing does NOT end up in nature

Since 2013, The Saint Story stores have collected **almost 39,000 tonnes of clothing**. This is equivalent to **198 million t-shirts**.

Learn more at saintstory.com/recycle-program

Recycled Material of Sold Clothes

| Year | Percentage |
|------|------------|
| 2013 | 11% |
| 2014 | 13% |
| 2015 | 20% |
| 2016 | 26% |
| 2017 | 31% |
| 2030 | 100% |

60 52 Comments 3 Shares 545 Views

Like Comment Share

Condition 2: Corporate-praising X Low transparency

Saint Story
Yesterday at 3:30pm ·

Recycle Clothes
Saint Story's recycling program ensures that every piece of clothing does not end up in nature

Over the years, The Saint Story stores have collected **tonnes of recycled clothing**.

60 52 Comments 3 Shares 545 Views

Like Comment Share

Condition 3: Consumer-praising X High transparency

Saint Story
Yesterday at 3:30pm ·

Recycle Your Clothes

With every piece YOU recycle, YOU save it from destroying nature.

Since 2013, consumers have donated **almost 39,000 tonnes** of customer-recycled clothing

This is equivalent to **198 million t-shirts**

Learn more at saintstory.com/recycle-program

| Year | Percentage |
|------|------------|
| 2013 | 11% |
| 2014 | 13% |
| 2015 | 20% |
| 2016 | 26% |
| 2017 | 31% |
| 2030 | 100% |

60 Likes 52 Comments 3 Shares 545 Views

Like Comment Share

Condition 4: Consumer-praising X Low transparency

Saint Story
Yesterday at 3:30pm ·

Recycle Your Clothes

With every piece YOU recycle, YOU save it from destroying nature.

Over the years, customers have donated **tonnes of recycled clothing**

60 Likes 52 Comments 3 Shares 545 Views

Like Comment Share

Appendix IV - Survey

Introduction

Dear participant,

Thank you for participating in a research that is conducted by a Master student at the Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Netherlands. The purpose of this research is to explore your attitude towards an advertisement. Your participation will be limited to the completion of a web-based survey and should not take more than 10 minutes. All answers you provide will remain strictly confidential and will not be used for other purposes besides this research. In case you would like to receive the research outcomes, please send an email to

455139th@student.eur.nl

One condition (the brand story and campaign advertisement) was shown after the introduction. Thereafter, the questions were posed to the respondents.

Corporate Citizenship (perception)

1. This company:

a. Has a positive influence on society

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|---------------------------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither agree or disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

b. Acts responsibly to protect the environment

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|---------------------------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither agree or disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

c. Supports good causes

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|---------------------------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither agree or disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Corporate Reputation

2. The overall impression of this brand is:

| | | | | |
|-------------|---|---|---|-----------|
| Unfavorable | | | | Favorable |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

3. This is a firm I can trust

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|---------------------------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither agree or disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

4. This is a firm that cares about its customers

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|---------------------------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither agree or disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

5. This is a firm I believe in

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|---------------------------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither agree or disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Purchase Intention

6. I would purchase this brand

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|---------------------------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither agree or disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Personal-CSR fit

7. Every person should stop increasing their consumption of clothes so that our resources will last longer.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|---------------------------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither agree or disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

8. I don't think we're doing enough to encourage manufacturers to use recyclable materials.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|---------------------------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither agree or disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

9. Natural resources must be preserved even if people must do without some products.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|---------------------------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither agree or disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

10. All consumers should be interested in the environmental consequences of the products they purchase.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|---------------------------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither agree or disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

11. Pollution is personally affecting my life.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|---------------------------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither agree or disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

12. I have often thought that if we could just get by with a little less clothes there would be more left for future generations.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|---------------------------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither agree or disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

13. Manufacturers should be forced to use recycled materials in their manufacturing and processing operations.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|---------------------------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither agree or disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

14. I would be willing to stop buying clothes from companies guilty of polluting the environment even though it might be inconvenient.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|---------------------------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither agree or disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Manipulation Check

15. Do you consider this advertisement to be highly transparent for providing information on the recycling program?

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|---------------------------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither agree or disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

16. In the advertisement, who is emphasized as the change maker of the campaign?

- j. The company
- k. You, yourself
- l. The employees
- m. The investors

Demographics

17. Please indicate your gender

- g. Male
- h. Female

18. How old are you?

19. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?

- i. Less than high school
- j. High school
- k. Trade / Technical / Vocational training
- l. Bachelor's degree
- m. Master's degree
- n. Doctorate

20. What is your nationality?

21. Do you recycle your clothes?

Final thank you

Thank you very much for your participation. If you would like to receive the results of this research, please send an email to 455139th@student.eur.nl.

Please click through to save your answers.

Have a nice day!