CSR in the fashion industry: the effects of consistency, fit and social cause involvement

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ABSTRACT

The increased importance for companies to be viewed as socially responsible by consumers has increased the engagement in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as well in recent years. This is also the case for companies in the fashion industry. The current study aimed to research the influence of two aspects of CSR engagement and – communication on corporate reputation and perceived CSR authenticity. CSR actions are not always executed as claimed, which is especially apparent in the fast fashion industry. Fast fashion brands such as ZARA and H&M have been exposed for not walking their CSR talk, meaning that they do not act upon the CSR claims they have made. The consistency in CSR talk and walk was hypothesized to be a factor that influences consumer responses to CSR engagement, similarly to CSR fit. While fit is a widely studied concept, researching its direct – and moderating influence within the context of the fashion industry in this study has expanded the literature on it further. The current study also aimed to research the moderating influence of consumers' social cause involvement on the effects of consistency in CSR talk and walk and CSR fit. With the use of a quantitative online experiment with a 2 x 2 between-subject design, the following research questions were answered: *How do the consistency in CSR talk and walk (inconsistent vs consistent) and CSR fit (low vs high) affect perceived CSR authenticity and corporate reputation in the fashion industry?* and *To what extent does CSR fit moderate the possible effects of consistency in CSR talk and walk, and how does consumer's social cause involvement moderate the possible effects of consistency in CSR talk and walk and CSR fit on perceived CSR authenticity and corporate reputation in the fashion industry?*

This study included four conditions, in order to represent consistent and inconsistent CSR talk and walk, the participant was either shown a fast – or slow fashion company. Moreover, the high CSR fit condition was represented by the company recycling and donating clothes. The low-fit condition included donating money to schools in India and Bangladesh. Confirming the hypotheses, consistent talk and walk was found to have a positive effect on perceived CSR authenticity and corporate reputation. However, CSR fit had no direct – or moderating effect. Furthermore, the level of social cause involvement only had

a moderating effect on the relationship between consistency and corporate reputation. These findings highlight the importance of consistency in actions and claims in order to obtain the advantages of CSR engagement. Additionally, CSR fit might not be an important factor when the level of social cause involvement of consumers is generally high.

Table of contents

1. Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become an important concept in the last decades. In a broad sense, CSR can be defined as "the commitment to improve societal well-being through business practices and contributions of corporate resources" (Kotler & Lee, 2005, p. 3). The increased importance and benefits of CSR have become apparent in different areas of business, as CSR can be beneficial for long-term customer support and loyalty (Huang et al., 2017) and good performance of a company in general (Siddiq & Javed, 2014). This heightened significance of CSR can be noticed in many industries, including the fashion industry. In response to increased consumer demand, fashion brands are engaging in CSR in order to make their daily operations more sustainable for example (Kapferer & Michaut, 2015; Colucci et al., 2019). However, fast-fashion brands such as H&M and ZARA have received criticism from the public regarding social - and environmental issues. Fast fashion refers to the business model which provides new fashion trends to the market as fast as possible, because of that, the production of clothing is often outsourced to countries with cheap labour (Choi, 2013). Many brands in the fast fashion industry have been blamed for creating poor labor welfare, environmental pollution and also destroying excess stock (Chan et al., 2020). As a response to the fast fashion industry, the contrasting slow fashion movement emerged. Slow fashion encompasses clothing being made sustainably and ethically (Fletcher, 2007). These companies for example use environmentally friendly materials and reduce waste by recycling (Jung & Jin, 2014).

Many fast fashion companies seem to use CSR engagement as a way of improving their unethical and environmentally unfriendly reputation (Perryer, 2019). Inditex, the world's largest fashion retailer that owns ZARA, introduced a CSR policy in 2016 in which they make several claims regarding their ethical working conditions and the improvement of their environmental impact. SACOM (Students and Scholars Against Corporate Misbehaviour) is a non-governmental organisation from Hong Kong that publicizes and monitors misconduct in supply chains. Their investigative report from 2016 uncovered the reality of the working conditions in Chinese factories of several fast fashion brands, including ZARA. The CSR policies from these brands were proven to be empty promises, and the issues of the unacceptable conditions were said to be covered up. Their investigation unveiled the inconsistency between CSR claims and actions in the fast fashion industry. While these fashion companies aim to improve their reputation and the general view of consumers by engaging in CSR, inconsistency in their actions and claims can contribute to negative

consumer perceptions (Christensen et al., 2020) and stakeholder skepticism (Webb & Mohr, 1998). In the current study, actions and claims will be referred to as CSR *talk* and *walk*; the communication about CSR (Colucci et al., 2019), and the actual implementation of it. Consistency in CSR *talk* and *walk* is a factor of CSR that has been constructed for this current study since a comparable factor could not be found in the literature. Consistency in CSR talk and walk might be valuable to reap the intended benefits of engagement in CSR. Consistency has been theorized to improve corporate reputation and credibility (Herbig & Milewicz, 1993) and it has also been thought to have a positive effect on consumer attitudes (Yoo & Lee, 2018). A further important condition for successful CSR engagement is that it should be perceived as genuine and real by consumers (Alhouti et al., 2016), which can be defined as *CSR authenticity*. Perceived authenticity is relevant to the evaluation of CSR since it determines the acceptance and relative success of CSR engagement (Beckman et al., 2009). In this study, it is researched whether consistency in CSR *talk* and *walk* improves the perceived authenticity of the CSR action, as well as the company's reputation. Inconsistency might then provoke a negative effect.

Another influential aspect of CSR engagement that has been studied extensively is *CSR fit*. CSR fit refers to the degree to which stakeholders recognize the relationship between the company and their CSR initiatives (Gupta & Pirsch, 2006). A distinction is often made in the literature between *low* and *high* fit. Previous studies have suggested that fit influences consumer responses in different ways. For example, it has been found to affect the evaluation of CSR behaviour (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006) and CSR authenticity (Kim & Lee, 2020). While many researchers argue that high fit is a key variable for the success of CSR (e.g., Becker-Olsen et al., 2006) and it positively affects consumer responses, others claim the opposite and have found that high fit enhances negative consumer evaluations (e.g., Drumwright, 1996). Since the findings of these studies are dissimilar, this study investigates the effects of CSR fit in the context of the fashion industry.

The focus of the current study is on the two aforementioned aspects; consistency in CSR talk and walk and CSR fit. These factors are influential within CSR, and possibly important for the success of CSR engagement. Since it has become more essential for companies to be perceived as socially responsible (Maignan & Ferrel, 2004), it is important to study the influence of these factors and the possible relationship between them. This research, therefore, investigates whether consistency in CSR talk and walk (consistent vs inconsistent) and CSR fit (low vs high) affects perceived CSR authenticity and corporate

reputation. Subsequently, the following research question is proposed, which will be answered by using an experimental research design:

> **RQ1:** *How do the consistency in CSR talk and walk (inconsistent vs consistent) and CSR fit (low vs high) affect perceived CSR authenticity and corporate reputation in the fashion industry?*

Instead of a direct influence on consumer responses, CSR fit has also been studied as a moderating influence. It has been theorized that high fit and low fit elicit different cognitive processes (Bigné-Alcañiz et al., 2012; Kim & Ferguson, 2019). Because of these differences, fit can moderate the relationship between, for example, corporate reputation and consumer responses (Kim & Ferguson, 2019). This study also aims to research the moderating influence of fit. Another moderating influence that has been mentioned within the marketing literature is the level of involvement with the supported social cause. Specifically within the cause-related marketing context, social cause involvement is described as an influential moderator in consumers' attitudes and behavioural intentions (e.g., Patel et al., 2016). It can be explained as the degree to which consumers find the social cause supported by the company personally relevant (Landreth & Garretson, 2007). The moderating effect of social cause involvement is often explained by the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) of persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). The ELM provides a theoretical framework for different routes through which consumers process information of marketing messages and change their attitude. Through which route the consumer processes information depends on their level of involvement. Highly involved consumers utilize the central route, meaning that their attitude and behaviour is based on processing central information of the message, for example the content or the credibility of the source. In the current study, consistency in CSR talk and walk can be categorized as central information. On the other hand, consumers who are less involved process information through the peripheral route. This route includes relying on peripheral message cues such as the attractiveness of the brand, the number of arguments given (Browning et al., 2018), or the fit between the cause and the company (Nkwocha et al. 2005). Not many studies have researched the possible moderating effect of social cause involvement in the CSR framework. Since CSR fit and involvement have been found to be significant moderators in the relationships between several message – and company aspects, and consumer responses, a second research question is introduced:

RQ2: *To what extent does CSR fit moderate the possible effects of consistency in CSR talk and walk, and how does consumer's social cause involvement moderate the possible effects of consistency in CSR talk and walk and CSR fit on perceived CSR authenticity and corporate reputation in the fashion industry?*

The current study contributes to the literature on CSR, given that the influence and interaction of important factors of CSR engagement and communication is researched. Despite the fact that CSR is an extensively researched topic, the introduction of a new aspect, consistency in CSR talk and walk, brings new insights into the research field. Furthermore, the possible moderating effect of social cause involvement has not been researched many times within CSR. As the level of consumers' social cause involvement is a consideration when choosing a social cause for a CSR initiative (Choi, 2020), it is important to study the possible moderating influence of it. Also, by investigating the moderating influence of the level of involvement the consumer has, the findings of other studies towards involvement in the marketing literature are extended. Moreover, not many researchers have focused their CSR research on the fashion industry. Some experimental studies focus on the food industry (e.g., Elving, 2013; Kim & Ferguson, 2019) or the automobile industry (e.g., Kim & Lee, 2019). This study is therefore able to expand the findings of previous studies by studying the effects and relationships between the several aspects of CSR engagement in the fashion industry.

The aim of this study is also to provide societal relevance. It aims to provide organizations more guidance in improving their CSR and choosing the right CSR strategy. The findings of this study show to what extent certain aspects of CSR - consistency in CSR talk and walk and CSR fit - can affect possible determinants of the success of engagement in it. These findings specifically aid fashion companies in improving their CSR strategy and therefore in turn maximize the effectiveness of their CSR engagement. Furthermore, the importance of 'walking the CSR talk' might be highlighted. Consumer skepticism towards CSR has been rising in recent years (Rim & Kim, 2016). Higher levels of skepticism hinder companies from obtaining the advantages of engagement in CSR. By acting upon CSR claims, consumers might view the company as more authentic, and corporate reputation might improve. Potential positive effects of consistency are therefore researched in this study.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Corporate Social Responsibility

CSR is a broad concept since it encompasses various issues and is used in several different fields, such as public policy and public relations. Because of this, exactly defining CSR poses some difficulties. A definition of CSR that is often used in various fields is proposed by Carroll (1991), which states: "The social responsibility of business encompasses the economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time" (p. 283). This normative definition provided by Carroll (1991) refers to the multiple functions of organizations. In order to further gain an understanding of this definition, it is important to explore the history of CSR. At the start around the 1950s when academic research and focus on CSR began, it mostly had a philanthropic character. At that time, companies mainly donated money to charities (Carroll, 2008). A change in the belief that businesses also had a social responsibility came from Bowen (1953), who stated that large corporations had great power, and with this power also came impacts on society. Because of this, there came a need for organizations to change their decision-making in order to include considerations of their impact. In the 1970s, CSR evolved further and was influenced by social movements and legislation (Agudelo et al., 2019). Additionally, public debate around CSR advanced and centered around the idea that organizations function by public consent, and the purpose of these organizations is to serve to the satisfaction and the needs of society (Committee for Economic Development, 1971). The focus of CSR shifted towards a stronger connection between business and society.

Going further into the evolution of CSR, during the 1990s is when CSR gained international appeal, due to globalization and an increase in sustainable development (Agudelo et al., 2019). A clear example of the expansion of the concept and framework of CSR is the "Pyramid of Corporate Social Responsibility'' presented by Carroll (1991, p. 42), and constitutes the aforementioned definition of CSR. Carroll aimed to provide an approach to CSR for businesses to balance their obligations to stakeholders and commitments to shareholders. With this pyramid, he defined the four main responsibilities of organizations (see Figure 1). The first component, *economic* responsibilities, embodies the primary incentive of businesses: produce goods and services and make maximum profit. Carroll (1991) suggests that all other business responsibilities can be predicted from the economic responsibility, given that the other responsibilities are only considerations without it. Secondly, businesses are expected to comply with the laws and regulations by the

governments, which is its *legal* responsibility. Moreover, *ethical* responsibilities encompass the standards and norms which are expected or ruled out by members of society. The last component of the pyramid, *philanthropic* responsibilities, has often been critiqued since it has been deemed to go beyond the core of businesses (Lin-Hi, 2010) which in the end is making a profit. This responsibility includes being a good corporate citizen, and actively engaging in programs or acts in order to improve the quality of life or promote goodwill.

Figure 1.

Model of the Pyramid of Corporate Social Responsibility (Carroll, 1991)
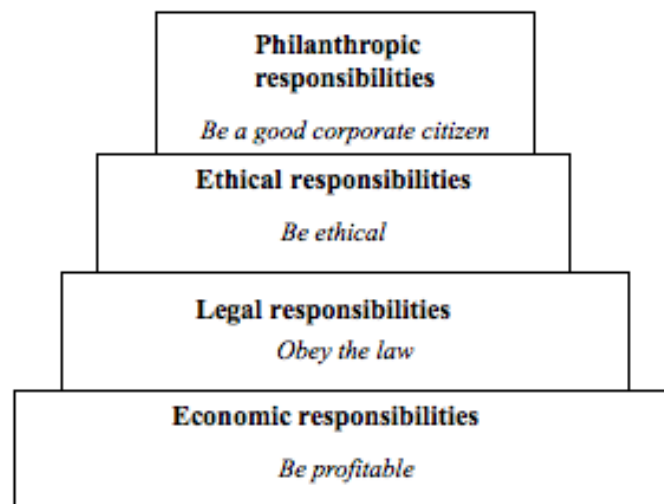
To explore the four responsibilities by Carroll (1991) further, the four drivers for engagement in CSR found by Garriga and Melé (2004) will be explained. From the literature, they have distinguished four motives for companies to engage in CSR. The first driver is the *instrumental* purpose, which refers to the use of CSR to drive profit, and solely the economic aspect is being considered. Every CSR action is then only accepted if it is used to create profit (Garriga & Melé, 2004). The *political* purpose emphasizes the social power of an organization. Companies accept their social duties and rights, and even participate in social cooperation. Corporate citizenship is a term that is mentioned in their paper in the context of the political purpose. It can be connected to the philanthropic responsibilities (Carroll, 1991) since it refers to the role of an organization in society. The third motive is the *integrative* purpose. This includes the integration of social demands into corporate management. Garriga and Melé (2004) propose that companies depend on society for growth, continuity, and

existence. Lastly, the *ethical* purpose is explained. CSR is viewed as an ethical obligation, and companies will engage in it to create a better society. These drivers illustrate that there are several motives and goals for engaging in CSR.

In the contemporary context, CSR has become an increasingly important part of business. There are several reasons that can be distinguished for this increase of importance of CSR. In the first place, consumers' level of income has been increasing, which pushes companies to differentiate themselves in different ways (Chandler, 2019). Furthermore, globalization has expanded the influence of companies, and also has increased their social responsibility that is expected by consumers. Also due to the rise of information technology and social media, companies are more easily criticized for their behaviour by consumers. Lastly, CSR has increasingly been seen as a strategic means to for example improve a company's reputation (e.g., Du et al., 2010) and many prior studies treat it as a business strategy (e.g., Kim & Lee, 2019). Nowadays, a more strategic approach has been taken to CSR (Agudelo et al., 2019) and also the term Strategic CSR was introduced. Following this approach, Porter and Kramer (2006) argued that through CSR, companies can achieve a competitive advantage, while simultaneously creating shared value in terms of benefiting society. Their view on CSR has widely been adopted by practitioners and scholars.

2.2 CSR in the fashion industry

The current study focuses on CSR in the fashion industry. A distinction has been made between *fast* and *slow* fashion, which are two contrasting branches of the fashion industry. The fast-fashion phenomenon has changed the industry over the last decade; fashion trends are introduced and replaced in a faster pace than ever (Kozlowski et al., 2012). This is accompanied by low prices, due to the low-cost production and the sourcing of cheap materials (McNeill & Moore, 2015). This increase in trends also has led to an increase in environmental and social impacts by the fashion industry. As a reaction to the domination of the industry by fast-fashion companies, the slow fashion movement started. The movement has taken inspiration from the "slow food'' movement, which emphasized slow cooking methods and buying local produce (Fletcher, 2010). Slow fashion is inherently environmentally friendly since natural resources are not exploited and clothing is not produced at such a rapid pace (Jung & Jin, 2014). This type of production improves the quality of life for all workers and reduces the amount of waste.

As explained in the introduction, many companies in the fashion industry are engaging in CSR due to increased pressure from stakeholders. Since the fashion industry is

quite known for its poor working conditions and for being the second largest polluter of the environment, it is important for fashion companies to adopt CSR practices in order to make a change (Colucci et al., 2019). Additionally, the fashion industry is highly customer oriented (Colucci et al., 2019), which could explain the reaction of introducing CSR policies and initiatives after experiencing public backlash against their unethical and non-sustainable practices (Kozlowski et al., 2012). Some prior studies have researched the implementation of CSR in the fast fashion industry (e.g., Chan et al., 2020; Li et al., 2014). For example, Goworek (2011) states that much of the focus of these CSR activities tend to be on social and environmental issues related to single aspects of the industry, rather than the industry as a whole and the complete cycle of production. An example of this is H&M encouraging customers to reuse or recycle bags. While they almost recycled at least 95% of waste in its distribution centers, their core business model is still focused on cheap prices and frequent trend changes (Li et al., 2014). Contrasting the fast fashion industry, slow fashion incorporates social responsibility, sustainability, transparency, and other concepts in their business to improve industry practices as well as maintain profitability (Fletcher, 2010).

2.3 CSR communication

Given that the focus of this research is partially on CSR communication and aspects of it, it is important to understand the way businesses communicate their CSR engagement. Scholars have previously theorized that through communication, an organization develops shared meanings and understandings with stakeholders (Suchman, 1995). Meaning that without communication, stakeholders would not be aware of what an organization does or is planning to do. This stakeholder awareness, specifically of CSR activities, has been found to be a crucial requirement for the effectiveness of CSR engagement (Du et al., 2010). However, some studies have found that the level of awareness amongst both internal and external stakeholders is quite low, which impedes companies from reaping the benefits from their CSR engagement (Bhattacharya et al., 2008). This is where CSR communication can be used as a tool to enhance the awareness of the organization's activities.

There are multiple channels that are being used to communicate the engagement in CSR, which are either company-controlled or uncontrolled. The latter includes news media, experts' blogs, and social media which are not owned by the company (Kim & Ferguson, 2014). The focus of the current study however is on company-controlled tools which consist of advertising, social media outlets, annual reports, and corporate websites. Previous studies have discovered the preference for tools that are less explicit, such as annual reports and

corporate websites (Morsing & Schultz, 2006), with around 50% of participants in the study preferring these types of methods. The preference for advertising as a CSR communication method decreased over time for the participants. Webb and Mohr (1998) even found the extensive use of advertising to not be effective since it increases skepticism amongst stakeholders and decreases the credibility of the CSR message.

Given the increase in popularity of using social media as a way of communicating in the last decade, many organizations have been using it as well for their CSR communication. Social media has interactive and social characteristics, which helps companies reach more openness and transparency towards their stakeholders (Sutton, 2016). Several studies argue that social media can be an effective channel for CSR communication. For example, Du and Vieira (2012) suggest that social media platforms help to reduce stakeholder skepticism. Additionally, Lyon and Montgomery (2013) claim that social media has improved the quality of CSR communication and has reduced greenwashing.

Annual reporting is a tool that nowadays is not only being used for mandatory financial reporting but also for CSR communication. The emergence of annual reports can be seen as organizations attempting to increase their transparency regarding their CSR (Nielsen & Thomsen, 2007). This emergency mostly came as a response to several corporate scandals, climate change, and concerns about labour rights amongst other things (Noronha et al., 2012). Annual reports are seen as an important tool for communicating the CSR engagement of a company. They are also used to maintain good relationships with stakeholders (Michelon et al., 2015).

Alongside social media and annual reports, corporate websites are one of the most used tools for CSR communication. Corporate websites serve as a source of information for stakeholders about a company's CSR. Through the corporate website, companies can report on their business activities. Furthermore, they are able to shape the corporate messages that are getting posted on their website. By shaping these messages, companies can manage their identity and their reputation (Eberle et al., 2013; Rolland & Bazzoni, 2009). Corporate websites also allow for two-way stakeholder communication which is made possible by the addition of the option of comments or by a forum (Rolland & Bazzoni, 2009). Given that corporate websites are a preferred communication channel for CSR, this study focuses on communication through this channel.

2.4 CSR authenticity

Authenticity has been examined in various fields, such as psychology and sociology. The term authenticity refers to recognizing and believing that one's actions are sincere and aligned with one's core values (Mazutis & Slawinski, 2015). In the last couple of years, the term has been discussed in marketing literature, and has been described as a critical concept that affects the evaluations and judgements of consumers regarding the sincerity of marketing (Joo et al. 2019). Within the context of CSR, authenticity is defined as "the perception of a company's CSR actions as a genuine and true expression of the company's beliefs and behavior toward society that extend beyond legal requirements'' (Alhouti et al., 2015, p. 1243). Previous studies have considered authenticity to be an important variable for consumers' negative and positive perceptions of CSR (Beckman et al., 2009; Kim & Lee, 2019). For example, the perceived authenticity of a company's CSR activities can lead the consumer to either see these activities as a business tool, or as good corporate citizen behaviour (Mazutis & Slawinski, 2015). Beckman et al. (2009) explain the relevance of authenticity by stating that it diminishes the inherent tension of companies between making profits and being socially responsible. This tension can lead to more consumer skepticism towards the motives for engagement in CSR and it drives consumers to determine the level of authenticity of the company.

There are several drivers that contribute to the perceived authenticity of CSR engagement by consumers, such as perceived motive, social impact specificity, and benevolence (Fatma & Khan, 2020). However, Joo et al. (2019) have included two dimensions in their model that are relevant for the current study: congruence and reliability. Congruence refers to the degree of alignment between the CSR initiative and the core business of the company (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006), which is referred to as CSR fit in this study. Alhouti et al. (2016) mention that a good fit between the initiative and the company's concept and core business acts as an authenticity cue for stakeholders. Reliability is the consistency between CSR engagement and all other operations of a company (Wagner et al. 2009), and the stakeholders' perceptions of the degree to which the CSR initiative is what it appears to be. Subsequently, in order for stakeholders to view the engagement as authentic, the company should be consistent in what it does and what it says it does.

Alhouti et al. (2016) conclude that it is not enough for companies to behave in a socially responsible manner, but it is necessary that CSR activities should be viewed as credible and authentic in order to obtain the advantages of these activities. Skilton and Purdy

(2017) found that authentic evaluations of a company's CSR can provide a mechanism to explain how CSR engagement can achieve environmental and social impacts. Given the significance of a positive outcome of CSR engagement and the role that authenticity plays, it is important to study what factors of CSR and CSR communication can influence it.

2.5 Corporate reputation

Fombrun et al. (2000) define corporate reputation as: "a collective assessment of a company's ability to provide valued outcomes to a representative group or stakeholders'' (p. 243). The concept of corporate reputation has received a great deal of attention from scholars in the field of public relations since it is a key source of distinctiveness that can differentiate a company from another (Fombrun et al., 2004) and an important factor to achieve a competitive advantage (Sánchez & Sotorrío, 2007). It reflects the quality of services and products a company provides (Roberts & Dowling, 2002) and has also been deemed one of the most significant determinants for a company's success (Keh & Xie, 2009). In recent years, researchers have been addressing the link between CSR and corporate reputation. Particularly, some scholars argue that engaging in CSR is one of the most effective ways of building a good corporate reputation (e.g., Coombs & Holladay, 2012). The reason for this is that CSR engagement can signal a positive brand image to stakeholders. By investing in CSR initiatives, companies can differentiate themselves on a corporate level (Hsu, 2012). However, given the rise of greenwashing and an increase in consumer skepticism towards CSR (Rim & Kim, 2016), CSR engagements might not be viewed as "doing good", but rather as a way of improving corporate image. Furthermore, a higher level of skepticism decreases the benefits that a company might reap from engaging in CSR (Godfrey et al., 2009), meaning that a company's reputation might even become damaged.

Corporate reputation has been deemed a valuable aspect of a company's success, which also can be influenced by CSR. Therefore, it is beneficial to study which aspects of CSR communication and CSR can possibly affect it. Which components of CSR might or might not have an effect on corporate reputation has not been studied extensively. However, perceived CSR fit is an aspect of CSR that has been often mentioned as a cue that attracts consumers' attention and might cause positive company evaluations (Aqueveque et al., 2018; Deng & Xu, 2017). Higher levels of perceived CSR fit are argued to fulfill the expectations of stakeholders regarding the company's societal contributions, which will improve corporate reputation (Aksak et al., 2016). Some researchers suggest the opposite; low or moderate

levels of CSR fit might make stakeholders see the initiative as more deliberate and as a greater effort (Ellen et al., 2000), which will positively affect stakeholders' evaluations.

2.6 CSR talk and walk

As mentioned before, CSR communication is the focus of this study. A concept that can be defined as such is 'CSR talk'. CSR talk encompasses all external communication tools that a company uses to inform stakeholders about its CSR engagement (Colucci et al., 2020). Examples of these tools are annual reports, advertising, or corporate websites. However, CSR not only entails communication but also practices and implementation of initiatives, which can be illustrated as 'CSR walk'. The distinction between these two concepts comes from the expression 'walk the talk'.

In the study by Schoeneborn et al. (2020), three variants of the relationship between CSR talk and walk have been distinguished: *walking-to-talk*, *t(w)alking,* and *talking-to-walk*. The approach of *walking-to-talk* refers to actually doing the CSR before communicating about the activities. Within this approach, CSR communication is seen as an instrument that allows for framing and reporting of the actual CSR activities, which can possibly affect buying behaviour and stakeholder judgement of legitimacy. Another perspective, which is labeled as *t(w)alking*, constitutes the idea that CSR talk and walk are not only distinct dimensions of CSR but also occur simultaneously. Additionally, this approach assumes that CSR practices are produced and reproduced in communication (Schoeneborn et al., 2020), which gives CSR communication a formative role. Lastly, *talking-to-walk* refers to the view that CSR communication precedes the actual activities, and is an influential driver of actually shaping the implementation of CSR. An example of this approach is mentioned in the article by Christensen et al. (2013). In this article, the authors argue that inconsistencies between the actions and claims of an organization are important drivers for organizational change and also larger social change. However, other studies have highlighted the importance of 'walking the talk'. For example, Webb and Mohr (1998) found that inconsistency in behaviour and claims of an organization can prompt consumer skepticism, which also means that the company's CSR is perceived as less authentic.

Wagner et al. (2009) theorize that inconsistent information negatively affects consumer's beliefs about CSR, which are the overall assessments of the extent to which a company is socially responsible (Du et al., 2010). This could mean that consistency could have the opposite effect, meaning that consumers view the company as more socially responsible. Additionally, inconsistency between actions and claims can contribute to a

higher level of skepticism amongst consumers, which may make them view the company's CSR actions as less authentic. When a company is consistent in their CSR actions and claims, their CSR engagement might be viewed as more authentic when the company is consistent. Joo et al. (2019) also state that the more consistent a company is in what they say and what they do, the more authentic the CSR actions will be perceived to be by consumers.

Consistency and consistent communication are often mentioned in literature as important factors for a good corporate reputation (e.g., Klewes & Wreschniok, 2009). In the reputation model presented by Fombrun et al. (2004), consistency is one of the dimensions a good reputation consists of. They found that companies who orchestrated and integrated their initiatives cross-functionally had better reputations than those who were inconsistent in their behaviour. Herbig and Milewicz (1993) also emphasize the importance of consistency in actions and statements in order to improve an organization's reputation, as well as increase its credibility. It is therefore theorized that consistency in an organization's behaviour and claims could positively affect corporate reputation. This gives rise to the following hypotheses:

H1a: *Consistency in CSR talk and walk will positively impact perceived CSR authenticity among consumers more than inconsistency in CSR talk and walk.*

H1b: *Consistency in CSR talk and walk will induce a more positive corporate reputation among consumers than inconsistency in CSR talk and walk*

2.7 CSR fit

The concept of fit is well studied in marketing literature, in which it is often referred to as company-cause fit. The congruency between the company and the cause it is promoting has been found to play an important role in forming consumers' responses to cause-related marketing (Kim et al., 2015). While some researchers found that a high fit led to more positive company evaluations by consumers (Maoz & Tybout, 2002), other studies found the opposite effect of high fit. Hoeffler and Keller (2002) discovered that consumers perceived sponsorships with a high fit as the organization being opportunistic, which in turn provoked more skepticism and resulted in negative evaluations. Additionally, some studies encountered no effect of fit on purchase intention and attitude towards the company and the brand (e.g., Lafferty, 2007). These contradicting results are similar to the findings of studies in the CSR framework.

Several researchers have suggested that fit is a component of CSR that affects consumer responses and can eventually influence the overall evaluation of CSR engagement (Kim & Ferguson, 2019). In the context of CSR, fit is defined as the extent to which a CSR initiative is congruent and consistent with the company's products and services (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006). On one hand, scholars propose that high-fit initiatives positively influence CSR authenticity and attitude towards the company (e.g., Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Kim & Lee, 2019). Elving (2013) also documents that the more a company's CSR actions align with its core business, the lower the level of consumer skepticism towards CSR is, which suggests a higher level of perceived authenticity. These positive effects of a high-fit initiative could be supported by the congruence theory (Cha et al., 2016). This theory suggests that congruency and similarity influence cognitive retrieval and storage positively. This implies that when there is a high fit between a CSR initiative and a company, the initiative is more easily integrated into the consumer's cognition (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006).

On the other hand, however, some studies have found the opposite. These results show that high-fit initiatives increase skeptical stakeholder reactions (Drumwright, 1996; Ellen et al., 2000) and skepticism towards the motives of the company for engaging in CSR (Foreh & Grier, 2003). In their research, Foreh and Grier (2003) found that congruency between the brand and the cause increased the perception of the brand engaging in CSR due to self-serving motives. This in turn negatively influences company evaluation.

In many previous studies, cause-brand fit has been treated as a one-sided concept. Some scholars however have researched the concept further and have distinguished several types of fit. Kuo and Rice (2015) labeled perceptual – and conceptual fit, which are both based on different attributes of the organization. Conceptual fit refers to the congruency between brand image or positioning and the cause, whereas perceptual fit is the fit between perceptual attributes such as color and the social cause. Another distinction of fit was established by Bigné et al. (2012). In their research, they distinguished between *functional* and image fit. In the current study, the type of fit that is applied is functional fit, which refers to the relatedness between the social cause and the company's products and services. Image fit is the relatedness based on brand associations. Functional fit was found to have a direct, but gentle, influence on CSR perception. Image fit on the other hand influenced CSR perception indirectly, by affecting altruistic attributions (Bigné et al., 2012). It is expected that in this study, fit will have a direct influence on the outcome variables. Since the results of prior studies have been quite contradicting, the following hypotheses are constructed:

H2a: *CSR fit will affect perceived CSR authenticity among consumers*
H2b: *CSR fit will affect corporate reputation among consumers*

Previous researches have also studied fit as a moderator variable rather than a direct influence on consumer responses. For example, Bigné-Alcañiz et al. (2012) argue that the fit between the brand and the cause moderates the influence of corporate associations on consumers' evaluations of cause-related marketing. The rationale behind this is a theoretical framework that explains that the likelihood of using certain pieces of information to form a judgement depends on how accessible and important that information is (Feldman & Lynch, 1988). The pieces of information that are mentioned are corporate associations, namely CSR associations and corporate ability (CA) associations. CSR associations refer to the social nature of the brand, while CA is the perception of the economical part of the brand ((Bigné-Alcañiz et al., 2012). These associations are said to be equally as important in forming attitudes, however, the accessibility is thought to vary depending upon cause-brand fit. They hypothesize that high fit will make the marketing campaign seen as a credible CSR message, since the accessibility of CSR associations is then higher in consumer's minds and will be used to form a judgement (Bigné-Alcañiz et al., 2012). In turn, low fit will make the message seem purely persuasive and as a way to make a profit (Drumwright, 1996), then CA associations will be used by consumers to form their attitude. The results of their study demonstrate that CSR fit does have a moderating effect on the relationship between corporate associations and brand attitude.

Another study that hypothesized cause-brand fit, particularly CSR fit, to moderate the relationship between different variables was conducted by Kim & Ferguson (2019). They suggest that high fit increases the influence of a positive corporate reputation, while low fit might reduce the role of existing negative perceptions of the brand. It was found that a company with a bad reputation received more positive consumer responses with low-fit CSR than with high-fit, while the contrary effect was encountered for companies with a good reputation. The authors provide theories that help explain these moderation effects of CSR fit, the theory of image transfer is particularly relevant for the current study. Image transfer is explained as the cognitive process of linking different symbols and meanings that are associated with one concept (e.g., TV show) to the other concept (e.g., sponsoring company) (Carillat et al., 2015). Kim & Ferguson (2019) apply this theory to corporate reputation and CSR fit; the perception of corporate reputation can be transferred to the CSR activities, which influences the outcome of CSR. High fit will accelerate the image transfer process, while low

fit initiatives will impede it. The current study focuses on corporate reputation as an outcome variable rather than a predictor, for that reason, consistency in CSR talk and walk is used as a replacement for reputation to test the possible moderation effect of CSR fit. Consistency in behaviour and claims by companies might also elicit responses and judgements by consumers, similarly to corporate reputation. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3a: *CSR fit moderates the relationship between consistency in CSR talk and walk and perceived CSR authenticity. Specifically, high CSR fit strengthens the effect of consistency in CSR talk and walk on perceived CSR authenticity. In contrast, low CSR fit weakens the effect of consistency in CSR talk and walk on perceived CSR authenticity*

H3b: *CSR fit moderates the relationship between consistency in CSR talk and walk and corporate reputation. Specifically, a high CSR fit strengthens the effect of consistency in CSR talk and walk on corporate reputation. In contrast, low CSR fit weakens the effect of consistency in CSR talk and walk on corporate reputation.*

2.8 Social cause involvement

The term involvement generally is conceptualized as the personal relevance or importance of an object or individual (Petty et al., 1983). This includes the values and perceived degree of interest or importance that are caused by a specific situation (Patel et al., 2016). From this, social cause involvement can be defined as "the degree to which consumers find the cause to be personally relevant to them" (Grau & Folse 2007, p. 20). Previous studies have found that involvement with the cause that is supported, specifically in cause-related marketing (CRM), can influence consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions (Hajjat, 2003). Lafferty and Goldsmith (2005) found that the greater the level of importance the cause has for a consumer, the more positive their response to CRM is. Additionally, in the context of CSR, social cause involvement has been found to increase the positive attitude towards CSR engagement (Choi, 2020). According to the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) of persuasion by Petty & Cacioppo (1986), which is one of the dual-process theories that explain changes in attitudes, consumers who are highly involved process information differently than consumers who are less involved. Highly involved consumers process central information, for example, issue-relevant arguments, while less involved consumers rely on peripheral cues for forming their attitudes, such as expert sources and celebrity endorsements (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Choi (2020) mentions a few examples of information that is

processed through the central route of the ELM: donation amount, duration of the campaign, and the impact of the CSR action. In this study, consistency in CSR talk and walk will likely be processed as central information, given that it is detailed information rather than a peripheral cue such as the fit between the cause and the company (Nkwocha et al. 2005). Based on the ELM and the results of previous studies, these hypotheses are proposed:

H4a: *Consumer's social cause involvement moderates the relationship between consistency in CSR talk and walk and perceived CSR authenticity. Specifically, a high level of social cause involvement strengthens the influence of consistency on perceived CSR authenticity. In contrast, a low level of involvement weakens the influence of consistency on perceived CSR authenticity.*

H4b: *Consumer's social cause involvement moderates the relationship between consistency in CSR talk and walk and corporate reputation. Specifically, a high level of social cause involvement strengthens the influence of consistency on corporate reputation. In contrast, a low level of involvement weakens the influence of consistency on corporate reputation.*

As mentioned before, the effects that fit has on different outcome variables and success factors of CSR vary between studies. Several previous scholars have hypothesized that the cause of these inconsistent results is individual personal characteristics of consumers (Kim & Lee, 2019; Choi, 2020). Kim and Lee (2019) found that highly involved consumers are less affected by CSR fit when evaluating the authenticity of CSR. These results could be explained by the ELM, given that perceived fit between the brand and the cause of the CSR initiative could be classified as a peripheral cue (Nkwocha et al., 2005). Considering that highly involved individuals mostly do not form their attitudes with the use of peripheral cues, but rather information surrounding the CSR engagement, CSR fit does not influence these individuals as is hypothesized in previous studies on the effect of fit. Kim and Lee (2019) also predicted that highly involved individuals doubt the genuineness of the company involved with CSR in the case of high fit. In this case, a higher level of social cause involvement might influence the effect of high fit CSR negatively. However, they found CSR fit to positively affect CSR authenticity and brand attitude. In this study, it is predicted that involvement with the social cause moderates the relationship between CSR fit and CSR authenticity, and corporate reputation. Based on this, the following hypotheses are established:

H5a: *Consumer's social cause involvement moderates the relationship between CSR fit and perceived CSR authenticity. Specifically, a high level of social cause involvement weakens the effect of CSR fit on perceived CSR authenticity. On the other hand, a low level of social cause involvement strengthens the effect of CSR fit.*

H5b: *Consumer's social cause involvement moderates the relationship between CSR fit and corporate reputation. Specifically, a high level of social cause involvement weakens the effect of CSR fit on corporate reputation. On the other hand, a low level of social cause involvement strengthens the effect of CSR fit.*

The predictions of the current study are summarized in the following two conceptual models.

Figure 2.
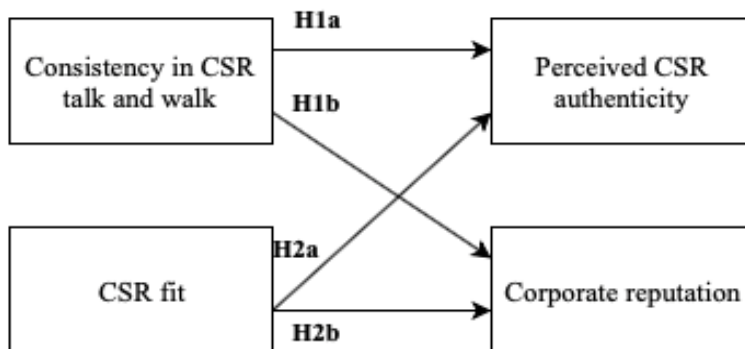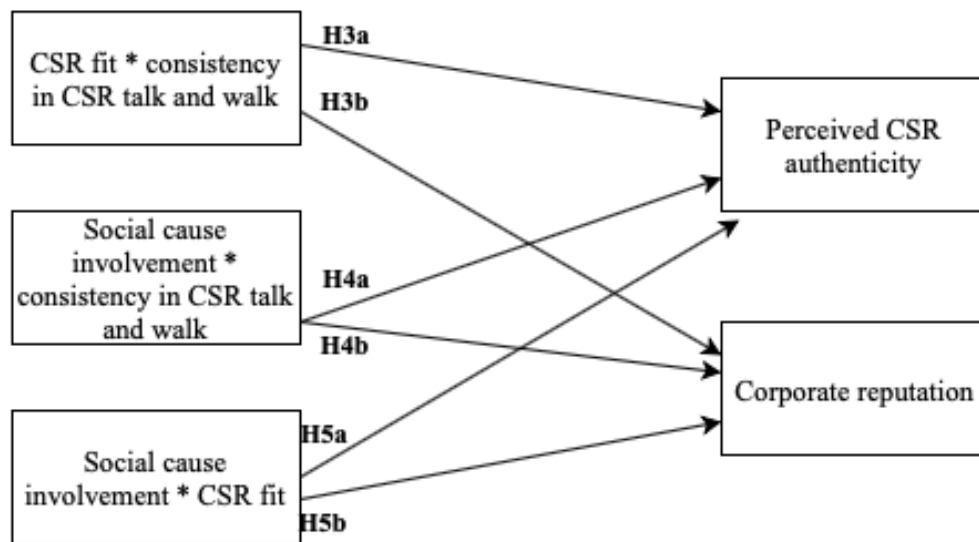*Conceptual model of the theoretical framework RQ1*

Figure 3.

Conceptual model of the theoretical framework RQ2

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

The current study applied a quantitative research approach in order to answer the research questions. Quantitative data needed to be collected and analyzed to investigate the relationships between the variables and correlations in this study. The specific quantitative research method that was applied in this study was an experiment, which was conducted through an online survey. Experiments can be classified as the appropriate method to assess the effect of an independent variable on a dependent variable (Neuman, 2014). This means that an experimental method is the most effective in providing evidence for causal relationships, in comparison to other quantitative methods. This study aimed to investigate the effects of CSR fit, consistency in CSR talk and walk, and social cause involvement. Furthermore, the independent variables were manipulated, an experiment is therefore the suitable research method.

The online experiment was constructed on the online tool Qualtrics, through which the respondents also participated in the experiment. The survey used a 2 (consistency in CSR talk and walk: consistent vs inconsistent) x 2 (CSR fit: high fit vs low fit) factorial between-subject design. This results in a total of four conditions, which can be found in Table 1. Every participant was only shown one condition, and every condition was randomly assigned to each participant. Randomization was applied because it is unbiased and facilitates between-group comparison with confidence (Neuman, 2014).

Table 1.

Experimental conditions

	Consistent CSR talk and walk	Inconsistent CSR talk and walk
High CSR fit	Condition 1	Condition 3
Low CSR fit	Condition 2	Condition 4

3.2 Sampling and data collection

Prior to the data collection, a pre-test was conducted to ensure the clarity of the experiment and the stimuli. The pre-test was conducted with a sample of 12 participants, who

were recruited from the social network of the researcher. The participants were all University students, ranging from the ages 18 to 25 years. After the pre-test, the research design was refined in accordance with their feedback. The first point of feedback was the picture quality of both the corporate website page and the online news article. The quality was improved and checked before distributing the survey. Moreover, almost half of the respondents did not pass both manipulation questions. For this reason, the manipulation questions were adapted to make sure that they were clearly formulated. The results of the pre-test are not included in the final dataset.

The experiment was distributed through the online crowdsourcing platform Amazon Mechanical Turk, through which all participants were recruited. This online platform was proven to be a convenient and quick way to find research participants. Respondents from this platform participated in this study in exchange for monetary compensation. The data collection was completed in three days, starting April 6th until April 8th, 2021. The sampling method with which the data was collected is convenience sampling. The aim of the current study was to recruit a minimum of 50 participants per condition, meaning 200 respondents in total. In the end, the sample consisted of 282 respondents. However, several responses had to be deleted because of validity issues. The final sample therefore consisted of 208 valid respondents. Regarding the four experimental conditions, 44 respondents were assigned to the high fit and consistent condition, 58 to high fit and inconsistency, 56 to low fit and consistency, and 50 to low fit and inconsistency. The conditions were assigned randomly to each participant.

3.3 Survey design

At the start of the experiment, the aim of the survey was explained to the participants with a short text. A broad definition of CSR was added into the text since it is a term that not everyone might have knowledge of. Additionally, general information regarding the survey was included, as well as information regarding consent. The contact information of the researcher was included in case respondents had any questions or comments about the experiment. Participants agreed with the terms and conditions by clicking next, thus starting the experiment. Before seeing one of the experimental conditions, respondents were asked two general questions as an introduction for the experiment: 'In general, are you interested in fashion?' and 'How familiar are you with the concept of CSR?'. The first question had the answer options 'Yes' or 'No'. The second question could be answered on a 5-point Likert scale. After these introductory questions, two images of a message on a corporate website of

a fashion brand, and one of an online news article were shown. The participants were asked to read them both carefully.

When proceeding after reading the corporate statement and the online news article, respondents were asked to indicate their agreement with nine statements. These statements aimed to measure perceived CSR authenticity and corporate reputation. The first five statements focused on the genuineness of the CSR activity and the company itself. The four statements of the RepTrak ™Pulse (Ponzi et al., 2011) assessed the number of good feelings, trust, admiration, and respect the participants had towards the company. After this, personal and demographic questions were proposed. The first question assessed the level of social cause involvement of the participants, by means of a 6-point semantic differential scale (Bigné-Alcañiz et al., 2010). This scale measures how interesting, or relevant the participants think the social cause is that the company promotes with their CSR initiative. The demographic questions included questions regarding age, gender, and educational level.

Lastly, as a manipulation check for consistency in CSR talk and walk and CSR fit, two questions were asked. The following question was proposed for consistency: 'Based on your understanding of the corporate statement and the news article, did the company act on their CSR claims (walk their talk)?'. The answer options were either 'Yes' and 'No'. For CSR fit, this question was asked: 'Do you think that the company's social responsibility action has a good fit with its core business?'. The respondents could choose 'Yes, the company's social responsibility action fits its products and services' or 'No, the company's social responsibility action does not fit its products and services' as their answer. At the end of the experiment, the survey code for Amazon Mechanical Turk was provided for the respondents to claim their incentive. Furthermore, they were thanked for their participation. It was stated that the experiment was completed by clicking the arrow below, in order to ensure that all data and answers would be saved. The contact information of the researcher was also added for any further questions or comments.

3.4 Experimental scenarios

In this study, a distinction was made between a slow fashion company and a fast-fashion company. The fictional slow fashion brand (Vêtements Verts) was a representation of consistency in CSR talk and walk, while the fast-fashion brand (Urbane Shop) represented inconsistency. The names of the brands were made up by the researcher by taking inspiration from existing clothing brands. The messages on the corporate website of each brand were

designed on Wix, which is a free web design website. Each message was constructed in the same way: a short description of the company itself and a description of the new CSR initiative (see Appendix B). The description of the brands was derived from a description of a real brand, but a few words were altered for each brand. The introduction of Vêtements Verts focused on sustainability and their ethical ways of creating fashion, thus being slow fashion. On the other hand, the fast fashion brand emphasized their cheap prices and often-changing trends. The different corporate messages were designed with the same picture, colours, and font for both brands. This was done in order to exclude the possible influence of these message factors.

The initiative that was introduced in the message on the corporate website was either high fit or low fit. Again, the explanation of the initiative was inspired by a real corporate message of a fashion company. The high fit initiative consisted of donating half of the excess stock to homeless shelters and recycling the other half. The initiative was introduced due to an increase in stock for both brands. The low fit condition announced a donation of 10% of the company's profits towards school supplies for children in India and Bangladesh. Given that it does not have a high fit with the core business of the company (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006), it can be considered a low fit initiative. Both brands claimed to want to support education and make a difference in people's lives.

The message on the corporate website was immediately followed by an online news article about the same brand (see Appendix C). Respondents who were assigned to the consistent condition read a news article which explained that the slow fashion brand did in fact walk their CSR talk. The donation of either the excess stock or 10% of the profits was confirmed. The news article highlighted the brand goal and their past CSR initiatives. In contrast with this, the fast-fashion company did not act upon their claims. The article mentioned a business report in which it is stated that the brand burned 80% of their excess stock, while only 20% got donated. In the article for the low fit initiative, the brand was accused of using child labour in Bangladesh, which is inconsistent with their claim of wanting to make a change in children's lives in India and Bangladesh. It was mentioned that the accusations were supported with proof such as pictures and eyewitness stories, however, these were not added. The fast-fashion aspect of the brand, low prices, and trends that change rapidly, was referred to in both articles. Moreover, the news articles for both companies did not include any images. The possibility of other aspects of an online article, such as images, affecting the outcome was minimized.

3.5 Operationalization

In the current study, two dependent variables and one moderator variable were measured in the experiment: perceived CSR authenticity, corporate reputation and social cause involvement. The three scales were validated in previous studies.

In order to measure perceived CSR authenticity, a scale that was developed by Alhouti et al. (2016) was used. It was developed to identify the factors that influence perceived CSR authenticity and to determine the relative importance of authenticity in the success of CSR initiatives. The 7-point Likert scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) and included eight items. The current study used five of the eight items, the reason for this is to avoid repetition. It is argued by some researchers that multi-item scales are often perceived as repetitive by participants, which reduces response rates (Wanous et al., 1997). However, the minimum number of items to measure a construct that often is accepted is four (Robinson, 2018). By adding one item, it was ensured that the scale measured the construct that it was aiming to measure. The following five items were used: 'The company is being true to itself with this CSR action', 'The CSR action is genuine', 'The company's CSR action is in accordance with the company's values and beliefs', 'This is a socially responsible company', and 'The company is concerned about improving the well-being of society'. Participants had to indicate their agreement with these statements on the seven-point scale. In order to validate this scale, a reliability test using Cronbach's alpha was conducted with all five items. A Cronbach's alpha of .70 or above is found to be acceptable (Abraham & Barker, 2014). The results of the reliability test show a Cronbach's alpha value of .951 ($\alpha = .951$). This suggests excellent internal reliability for the scale that was used. All five items were computed into one mean scale 'perceived CSR authenticity' ($M = 4.91$, $SD = 1.61$).

The scale to measure corporate reputation in the experiment was the RepTrak ™Pulse scale by Ponzi et al., (2011). It consists of four items which aim to measure the opinion of the participants on the company, and how much they trust and respect the company: 'This is a company I have a good feeling about', 'This is a company I trust', 'This is a company I admire and respect' and 'This company has an overall good reputation'. For each item, participants used a seven-point Likert scale to mark the extent to which they agreed with the items. All items of the RepTrak ™Pulse were included in the reliability analysis. The Cronbach's alpha value that was found ($\alpha = .949$) signals that the scale is highly reliable. All items were combined in one mean scale of 'corporate reputation' ($M = 4.78$, $SD = 1.66$).

The variable social cause involvement was measured by the use of a 6-item semantic differential scale that was constructed by Bigné-Alcañiz et al. (2010). They used the 5-item scale by Mittal (1995) which is used to measure product involvement. One global item by Beerli and Martín (1999) was also added. Above the items, "For you, the social cause promoted on the company's website…" was put, which was adapted from the research of Bigné-Alcañiz et al. (2010). A 7-point scale was used to measure the six items: 'is of little interest - very interesting', 'is irrelevant - relevant', 'means nothing to me - means a lot to me', 'is of no concern to me - is of concern to me', 'is not important - is important', and 'doesn't matter to me - does matter to me'. The six items were all included in reliability testing, which revealed a Cronbach's alpha of .898 ($\alpha = .898$). This value indicates a reliable scale, all items were therefore computed into one mean scale 'social cause involvement' ($M = 4.64$, $SD = 1.03$).

Table 2.

Mean and Standard Deviations of the variables

Variables	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha
Perceived CSR authenticity	4.91	1.61	.951
Corporate reputation	4.78	1.66	.949
Social cause involvement	4.64	1.03	.898

3.6 Demographics

After collecting all the data, the dataset consisted of 282 respondents ($N = 282$). However, several respondents were deleted after cleaning up the dataset. In total, 17 respondents were deleted due to not finishing the survey. After that, 57 participants were also deleted because their response time was under the mean response time in seconds on Amazon Mechanical Turk ($M = 120$). These participants could not be classified as valid because their response time was too short. The final dataset consisted of 208 respondents ($N = 208$) who completed the survey successfully.

In total, 58.7% of the participants was male ($N = 122$), 40.4% was female ($N = 84$), 0.5% was non-binary ($N = 1$), and 0.5% preferred not to say ($N = 1$). This shows that the male gender was represented more in the dataset than the other genders. Furthermore, the ages of

the respondents ranged from 18 to 65 plus. Participants could choose from age categories, for that reason the mean age in years cannot be estimated. The majority of the sample was between 25 and 34 years old (55.8%) and 35 and 44 years old (20.7%). The other age groups were less represented in this sample: between 18 and 24 years old (12.5%), 45 and 54 years (7.2%), 55 and 64 years (2.4%) and 65 plus (1.4%). Lastly, regarding the highest level of education, around half of the sample completed their bachelor's degree (55.3%). Other participants completed a master's degree (24.5%), high school (13.0%) or an associate degree (6.3%).

3.7 Manipulation checks

Two manipulation checks were conducted in this experiment in order to ensure that the dependent variables were manipulated successfully. Each participant was asked whether, from their understanding of the corporate website and the news article, the company acted on their CSR claims, and therefore walked their talk. The second question regarded the fit of the CSR initiative with the core business of the company.

From the complete sample (N=208), 102 participants were randomly assigned to the consistent CSR walk and talk condition. In total, 98 respondents passed this manipulation check. Furthermore, for the inconsistent condition, 106 participants were randomly assigned. Among these participants, 44 passed the manipulation check. The manipulation effect of consistency in CSR talk and walk was measured by the use of a crosstab test. The value of the Pearson Chi-Square showed a significant result X^2 (1, 208) = 41.37, $p < .001$. From this, it can be stated that consistency in CSR talk and walk was successfully manipulated with 95% certainty.

For the variable CSR fit, a manipulation check was also conducted. The condition high fit was assigned to 99 participants, from which 82 recognized that it was indeed high fit. For the low fit condition, 26 respondents from the 109 who were shown the low fit condition passed the manipulation check. The Pearson-Chi square value revealed an insignificant result of fit X^2 (1, 208) = 1.15, $p = .284$. This the means that it cannot be stated that the experiment stimuli CSR fit was manipulated successfully.

3.8 Validity and reliability

Validity and reliability are crucial concepts within research (Neuman, 2014). Several choices have been made in order to increase the validity and reliability of this study. In the first place, the dependent variables and the moderator variable were measured with the use of

pre-existing, validated scales from prior research. All scales had a Cronbach's alpha value higher than .70, which also suggests high reliability of the measurement scales. Moreover, the conditions of the experiment as well as the survey were pre-tested by a small sample. This was done to ensure that the survey was clear, and to test whether the manipulation of the participants was successful. The feedback the respondents gave was integrated into the final survey. Two manipulation checks were also included at the end of the survey. These were incorporated in order to test the effectiveness of the manipulation of the independent variables (consistency in CSR talk and walk, and CSR fit). Finally, the conditions of the experiment were randomly assigned to each participant. Applying random assignment to an experiment facilitates between-group comparison and makes it possible to draw inferential conclusions from the sample (Neuman, 2014).

4. Results

4.1 The effect of consistency in CSR talk and walk (consistent vs inconsistent)

In order to test H1a and H1b, two separate independent-samples t-tests were conducted. However, for both tests, equal variances could not be assumed given that Levene's test provided a significant number ($p < .001$). Therefore, the results of the t-tests should be interpreted with caution.

Hypothesis H1a suggests that consistency in CSR talk and walk results in a higher level of perceived CSR authenticity. Levene's test was found to be significant ($F (165.7) = 51.61, p<.001$), which means that there is a violation of equal variances. For that reason, the results should be interpreted with caution. The results show a significant difference between the condition consistency in CSR talk and walk, and inconsistency with regard to perceived CSR authenticity; $t(165.7) = 6.65, p < .001, d = .92$. Participants who were shown a company that was consistent in their CSR talk and walk perceived its CSR as more authentic ($M = 5.60$, $SD = 1.01$) than participants who were shown the inconsistent condition ($M = 4.25, SD = 1.81$). Levene's test was found to be significant, the effect size was therefore calculated using partial eta squared. The value ($\eta2 = .33$) suggests a large effect. The results confirm H1a, meaning that consistency in CSR talk and walk positively impacts perceived CSR authenticity.

Hypothesis H1b proposes that consistency in CSR talk and walk would induce a more positive corporate reputation than inconsistency. Equal variances could again not be assumed since Levene's test was significant ($F(165.7) = 38.25, p<.001$). The second independent-samples t-test showed a significant difference between the conditions consistent and inconsistent CSR talk and walk regarding corporate reputation; $t(175.5) = 5.63, p < .001, \eta2 = .27$. The partial eta squared value suggests a large effect. Consistency in CSR talk and walk induced a more positive corporate reputation among consumers ($M = 5.39, SD = 1.14$) than inconsistency ($M = 4.19, SD = 1.86$). These results show that corporate reputation is more positive when a company is consistent in their CSR talk and walk. H1b is therefore supported.

4.2 The effect of CSR fit (low vs high)

Two separate independent samples t-tests were conducted to test hypotheses H2a and H2b. Hypothesis H2a assumes that CSR fit affects perceived CSR authenticity among consumers. Levene's test was proven to be insignificant ($F(206) = .00, p = .992$), which

means that equal variances can be assumed. The results of the independent-samples t-test however indicate that there was no significant difference between low fit and high fit regarding perceived CSR authenticity; $t(206) = -.52$, $p = .572$, η2 = 0.00. Participants who were assigned to the high fit condition ($M = 4.85$, $SD = 1.61$) did not perceive the authenticity of the CSR action differently than those who were assigned to the low fit condition ($M = 4.97$, $SD = 1.63$). For this reason, H2a has to be rejected.

Hypothesis H2b posits that corporate reputation would be affected by CSR fit. Again, equal variances could be assumed since Levene's test was insignificant ($F(206) = .731$ $p = .394$). However, the results show that there was no significant difference in corporate reputation between high fit CSR ($M = 4.71$, $SD = 1.61$) and low fit ($M = 4.84$, $SD = 1.71$); $t(206) = -.56$, $p = .572$, η2 = 0.01. Participants who were shown the high fit initiative did not evaluate the corporate reputation more positively or negatively than participants who saw the low fit initiative, H2b is therefore rejected

4.3 The moderation effect of CSR fit (low vs high) on consistency in CSR talk and walk

In order to investigate whether CSR fit moderates the relationship between consistency in CSR talk and walk and perceived CSR authenticity (H3a) and corporate reputation (H3b), two separate two-way variance analyses were conducted. The interaction effect was tested by computing a moderating variable of CSR fit and consistency.

Hypothesis H3a predicts CSR fit moderating the relationship between consistency in CSR talk and walk and perceived CSR authenticity. A significant Levene's test ($F(3, 204) = 17.8$, $p < .001$) showed that equal variances could not be assumed. The results should be interpreted with caution. After conducting the Two-way ANOVA, it was found that the interaction effect between CSR fit and consistency was not significant ($F(1, 204) = .08$, $p = .775$, η2 = 0.00. Given that CSR fit was not found to be a significant moderator, H3a is rejected.

A second two-way variance analysis was conducted to test whether CSR fit moderates the relationship between consistency and corporate reputation (H3b). Again, equal variances could not be assumed due to Levene's test p-value being significant ($F(3, 204) = 14.0$, $p < .001$). The interaction effect between CSR fit and consistency was found to not be significant ($F(1, 204) = .11$, $p = .746$, η2 = 0.00. Based on these results, H3b has to be rejected.

4.4 The moderation effect of social cause involvement on consistency in CSR talk and walk

Before conducting a multiple regression analysis to investigate hypothesis H4a, all variables were standardized. Furthermore, the assumptions of the regression analysis were met. Also, a linear relationship between the independent- and dependent variables was found. Hypothesis H4a assumes that consumers' social cause involvement moderates the relationship between consistency in CSR talk and walk and perceived CSR authenticity. A moderator variable of social cause involvement and consistency in CSR talk and walk was computed. The results of the regression analysis show a R-square value of .237, which indicates that 23.7% of the variance can be explained by the variables. The variables were found to significantly predict perceived CSR authenticity $F(3, 204) = 21.17$, $p < .001$. Consistency ($b^* = .41$, $t = 6.69$, $p < .001$) and cause involvement ($b^* = .16$, $t = 1.98$, $p < .049$) are both significant predictors. The moderation effect of cause involvement on the relationship between consistency in CSR talk and walk and perceived CSR authenticity however was not found to be significant ($b^* = .133$, $t = 1.37$, $p = .172$). A higher level of social cause involvement of consumers does not strengthen the positive influence of consistency in CSR talk and walk on perceived CSR authenticity. For that reason, H4a is rejected

A second multiple regression analysis was conducted, which investigates hypothesis H4b. It suggests that the relationship between consistency in CSR talk and walk and corporate reputation is moderated by the level of consumers' social cause involvement. The moderator variable that was computed was used in the analysis. Again, the assumptions were met. The results show a R-square value of .233, which suggests that 23.3% of the model is explained by the variables. The results were found to be significant $F(3, 204) = 20.61$, $p < .001$. In this model, consistency ($b^* = .35$, $t = -5.77$, $p < .001$) and cause involvement ($b^* = .45$, $t = 1.61$ $p = .011$) were found to be significant predictors. Additionally, the moderation effect of social cause involvement was found to be significant ($b^* = .21$, $t = 2.59$, $p = .01$). These results show that a higher level of consumers' social cause involvement strengthens the positive effect of consistency in CSR talk and walk on corporate reputation. H4b can therefore be accepted.

Table 3.

Regression model for predicting perceived CSR authenticity and corporate reputation

	Perceived CSR authenticity	Corporate reputation

	$b*$	$b*$
Constant	4.26***	4.19***
Consistency	.41***	.35*
Social cause involvement	.16*	.13***
Involvement * consistency	.17	.21*
$R2$	.237	.233
F	21.17***	20.61***

Note: Significance levels: * $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$, *** $p<.001$

4.5 The moderation effect of social cause involvement on CSR fit

In order to test hypotheses H5a and H5b, two separate multiple regression analyses were conducted. Before conducting the tests, the variables were standardized. Additionally, a moderator variable of social cause involvement and CSR fit was computed in order to test the moderating effect.

Hypothesis H5a proposes that consumer's social cause involvement moderates the relationship between CSR fit and perceived CSR authenticity. Homoscedasticity could not be met for this analysis. A R-square value of .076 was found, which indicates that 7.6% of the variance in the model is explained by these variables. The model was found to be significant $F(3, 204) = 5.62$, $p = .001$. Social cause involvement was found to be a significant predictor for perceived CSR authenticity in this model ($b* = .36$, $t = 3.84$, $p < .001$). However, CSR fit was not a significant predictor ($b* = -.04$, $t = -.57$, $p = .571$). Furthermore, the moderation effect of CSR fit was found to be insignificant ($b* = -.15$, $t = -1.65$, $p = .101$). Based on these results, H5a has to be rejected.

The second multiple regression analysis tested the possible moderation effect of consumers' cause involvement on the relationship between CSR fit and corporate reputation (H5b). No homoscedasticity could be detected. The results show a R-square value of .090, which means that 9% of variance can be predicted by the variables. The model was significant $F(3, 204) = 6.76$, $p < .001$. The variable social cause involvement was found to be a significant predictor of corporate reputation ($b* = .37$, $t = 3.98$, $p < .001$), while CSR fit was not ($b* = -.04$, $t = -.63$, $p = .533$). The moderation effect of social cause involvement was also not significant ($b* = -.12$, $t = -1.25$, $p = .231$). Thus, H5b is rejected.

Table 4.

Second regression model for predicting perceived CSR authenticity and corporate reputation

	Perceived CSR authenticity $b*$	Corporate reputation $b*$
Constant	4.97***	4.84***
CSR fit	-.04	-.04
Social cause involvement	.36***	.37***
Involvement * CSR fit	-.16	-.12
$R2$	.076	.090
F	5.62**	6.76***

Note: Significance levels: * *p*<.05, ** *p*<.01, *** *p*<.001

5. Discussion

It has been increasingly important for companies to be socially engaged and to positively contribute to society (de Jong & van der Meer, 2015). CSR has therefore been gaining importance in recent years, also due to the strategic importance it has for companies. This current study aimed to gain knowledge on the effects that two aspects of CSR – consistency in CSR talk and walk and CSR fit – have on the perceived authenticity of the CSR action and corporate reputation. Additionally, the possible influence of personal characteristics of consumers – social cause involvement – on the relationship between these aforementioned aspects and outcome variables was also researched. The findings of this study, which were realized with six hypotheses, will be discussed in the next section.

5.1 Theoretical implications

Consistency in actions and claims and consistent information have been theorized to be factors that positively influence the credibility and reputation of a company (Herbig & Milewzic, 1993) and the consumers' perception of the level of authenticity of the CSR action. Inconsistency on the other hand has been found to encourage consumer skepticism (Rim & Kim, 2016) and might negatively affect corporate reputation. This study therefore posed the hypotheses that consistency in CSR talk and walk positively affects the outcome variables. Although Christensen et al. (2013) argue that inconsistency between a company's CSR actions and claims can drive organizational – and social change, the results of this study confirm that consistency has a positive effect on both perceived CSR authenticity and corporate reputation. Participants who were shown the slow fashion brand perceived the CSR action as more authentic than the fast fashion group. Furthermore, the slow fashion brand's corporate reputation was more positive than the reputation of the fast fashion brand. The constructed concept consistency in CSR talk and walk can therefore be categorized as an influential aspect in the consumers' perception of CSR engagement and communication.

While looking at the possible direct influence of CSR fit on consumer responses, theories surrounding it and findings of previous studies have been inconclusive and quite contradicting. Some researchers have suggested a positive effect of high fit (e.g., Kim & Lee, 2019) while others have found that high fit induces skeptical stakeholder responses and negative company evaluations (Drumwright, 1996; Foreh & Grier, 2003). It was therefore hypothesized that CSR fit would have an effect on perceived CSR authenticity and corporate reputation. However, H2a and H2b had to be rejected since there was no significant

difference found between low – and high fit in regard to the participants' responses. These results are in line with the findings of Lafferty (2007). Cause-brand fit did not play a key role in the consumers' formation of attitude or purchase intention, which is not in line with the congruence theory. This theory states that the more congruent information is, the better the retrieval and association of the information is (Lafferty, 2007). One reason for these insignificant findings could be that the variable of fit was not manipulated successfully. Low fit was not recognized by the majority of the respondents who were assigned to this condition. This could mean that fit between the cause and the brand might not have been an aspect of the CSR initiative on which they based their responses. Many previous studies that encountered a significant effect of fit were able to manipulate the variable with success (Kim & Ferguson, 2019; Kim & Lee, 2019; Yoo & Lee, 2018). Another possible explanation for these results could be that the level of social cause involvement of the respondents was, in general, quite high. Highly involved consumers have been theorized to base their attitudes on different types of information of the marketing message than lowly involved consumers do. In particular, consumers with low involvement use peripheral information such as fit, whereas those who are highly involved process central message information (e.g., donation amount, source credibility). The participants in this study were generally highly involved, which could mean that CSR fit was not information that influenced their responses, but rather the content of the corporate message or the consistency in CSR talk and walk.

The third hypotheses proposed that rather than a direct influence, CSR fit would moderate the relationship of consistency in CSR talk and walk, and the outcome variables. Several researchers considered fit as a moderator variable instead of a direct antecedent to consumer responses and found empirical evidence for this moderating effect (Kim & Ferguson, 2019; Bigné-Alcañiz et al. 2012). Nevertheless, the results of this study oppose the findings of these past studies, since no significant moderating effect of CSR fit was encountered. Again, the results could potentially be explained by the generally high level of social cause involvement of the respondents. Their focus while answering the questions might have been on the consistency in talk and walk, and not on the fit between the cause and the brand.

In the current study, the level of involvement that consumers have with the social cause was hypothesized to play a significant moderating role. On the basis of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), two hypotheses were established regarding the moderating effect of involvement on consistency in CSR talk and walk. It was expected that a high level of consumers' social cause involvement would strengthen the influence of consistent talk and

walk on perceived CSR authenticity and corporate reputation, and a low level of involvement would weaken this influence. H4a had to be rejected, because a high level of social cause involvement did not strengthen the influence of consistency on perceived CSR authenticity. This means that the level of consumers' social cause involvement did not moderate the relationship between the consistency in CSR talk and walk, and the perception of the authenticity of the CSR action. Past studies have investigated the moderating effect of social cause involvement on the relationships between several variables. For example, Choi (2020) studied the effect of involvement on the relationship between fit and attitude towards the CSR action. Bigné-Alcañiz (2012) investigated the effect of cause involvement on the relationship between consumer identification with the company and purchase intention. Both studies found that the level of involvement moderated the effects of fit and consumer identification. Often, it has been found that highly involved consumers process information in a message differently than lowly involved consumers. Through the two different routes of information processing in the ELM, consumers' attitude and behaviour is formed. Nevertheless, the consumers' perception of the authenticity of the CSR action might not have been formed through either of the routes of the ELM. Joo et al. (2019) distinguished multiple dimensions perceived authenticity consists of: community link, reliability (i.e., consistency), commitment, congruence (i.e., fit), benevolence, and transparency. Their dimensions were built upon the four dimensions that were constructed by Alhouti et al. (2016). Since perceived CSR authenticity consists of these multiple dimensions, it might be formed differently in the minds of consumers than attitude or purchase intention. Therefore, the ELM might not be the fitting theoretical framework to explain the formation of perceived authenticity, which explains the findings of this study. However, H4b could be supported; the influence of consistency in CSR talk and walk on corporate reputation was strengthened by higher social cause involvement. This finding confirms the results of past studies, namely that highly involved consumers rely on central information of the message to form their attitude, while lowly involved consumers do not. The formation of corporate reputation in consumers' minds could then be explained by the ELM. Since this study was done in the context of CSR in the fashion industry, it extends the findings of other studies that have researched the moderating influence of consumers' social cause involvement.

Lastly, a moderation effect of social cause involvement on the relationship between CSR fit and perceived CSR authenticity, and corporate reputation was expected. Due to the contradicting findings of previous studies of the effect that fit has on consumer responses, the hypotheses were not directional. These hypotheses were again established on the basis of the

ELM. Fit was classified as a peripheral cue, meaning that it is message information that will likely be processed through the peripheral route, which means that it is used by lowly involved consumers in order to form their attitude towards the message. Both hypotheses had to be rejected since no significant moderation effect of involvement was encountered in this study. Lowly involved consumers did not perceive the CSR action as more or less authentic in the case of high or low fit, in comparison to highly involved consumers. The same was encountered in regard to corporate reputation. The findings of this study contradict the findings by Choi (2020), who found a significant moderation effect of social cause involvement on the effect of fit on attitude towards the CSR action.

5.2 Managerial implications

This study not only intended to provide theoretical relevance, but also important managerial implications concerning CSR engagement and communication. While companies increasingly engage in CSR, consumer skepticism towards CSR is also increasing. In order for these companies to obtain the advantages of CSR, an essential factor is that it should be viewed as authentic and real. The findings of this study presented the influence of different aspects of CSR for corporate reputation as well as the perceived authenticity of the CSR action.

In the first place, for both corporate reputation and perceived CSR authenticity, the results of this study have emphasized that consistency in CSR talk and walk is an important aspect. Companies communicate about their CSR engagement through different channels, such as annual reports and corporate websites. However, whether they actually act upon their CSR claims is not always the case. Consequently, because of these inconsistencies between their claims and actions, consumers can view the authenticity of the CSR action as well as the company's corporate reputation more negatively. In order to reap the intended benefits of CSR engagement, companies should focus on walking their CSR talk instead of communicating their CSR actions without actually implementing them. Given that consumer skepticism towards CSR is increasing, being consistent in actions and claims might help decrease this skepticism. This will in turn help companies in obtaining the reputational advantages, as well as other advantages of CSR engagement.

Secondly, the fit between the CSR initiative and the brand might not be an aspect of CSR engagement that companies should focus more on. The findings of this study have shown that consistency in actions and claims influenced the consumers' responses while fit did not. This could have been because of the higher level of social cause involvement of the

consumers. It is therefore recommended to assess the target consumers' level of cause involvement before choosing a CSR - and CSR communication strategy. Assessing the level of involvement will, in the first place, present what social causes the target consumers personally find important and relevant. Secondly, when consumers are lowly involved, companies should focus more on message aspects such as fit. On the other hand, when consumers are highly involved, the focus should be more on aspects such as consistency, donation amount or the impact of the CSR action.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Summary

The aim of this study was to investigate the effects of consistency in CSR talk and walk and CSR fit, as well as the moderating effect of social cause involvement. The study applied an online experimental design in order to answer the two research questions. Six hypotheses were proposed based on past academic studies and literature to answer the two research questions. The experiment included CSR communication through a corporate website, with a fictitious company introducing a new CSR initiative. The respondents were shown either a low-fit or high-fit initiative. Two fashion companies from two contrasting fashion industries were constructed to represent consistency in CSR talk and walk. Urbane Shop, the fast fashion company, illustrated inconsistency in CSR talk and walk. The other company, Vêtements Verts was the representation of slow fashion and thus consistent CSR talk and walk. This resulted in four conditions, to which every participant was randomly assigned to.

As it was expected, consistency in CSR talk and walk was found to positively affect the outcome variables; the respondents perceived the CSR action as more authentic and the corporate reputation more positive of the slow fashion, and consistent, company. Moreover, it was assumed that CSR fit would affect the outcome variables, either positively or negatively. However, no significant effect of fit was encountered in this study. Thirdly, it was hypothesized that CSR fit would have a moderating effect on the relationship between consistency in CSR talk and walk, and perceived CSR authenticity and corporate reputation. These hypotheses were not accepted, since the findings revealed no significant moderating effect of fit. Finally, this study took the moderation influence of consumers' social cause involvement into account, which is the level of personal relevance of the social cause. It was found that involvement had an influence on one relationship in this study; a higher level of cause involvement strengthened the effect of consistency in CSR talk and walk on corporate reputation. The other expected moderation effects of social cause involvement were not found to be significant.

6.2 Limitations

While the findings of the current study extend the literature in the CSR framework, there are some limitations that should be acknowledged. Although experiments allow for control of the conditions and manipulation of the variables and thus increasing internal

validity (Neuman, 2014), there are some important limitations regarding external validity. The setting of participants reading a fictitious message on a corporate website and a fictitious newspaper article is not comparable to the real-life situation. Both the corporate message and the article were screenshots, meaning that participants could not click or scroll as if they were actually looking at a website or online newspaper. This setting might decrease the naturalistic generalizability of the results (Neuman, 2014). Considering the lower level of external validity that accompanies the use of experimental research, future research should consider using a different research method. Furthermore, the brands that were presented in the experiment were fictitious. For this reason, participants might have responded differently if it were to be companies that do exist. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies take into consideration using actual brands in the experiment. The variable of consistency in CSR talk and walk was artificially created by the use of the message on the website and the news article. With the use of existing brands, consistency in the actions and claims of companies might be perceived by the respondents as more natural. Moreover, the actual reputation of the company then can be treated as a direct influence on the consumer responses towards CSR engagement.

A second limitation is the unsuccessful manipulation of the independent variable CSR fit. Many participants did not recognize that the low fit CSR initiative did not have a good fit with the company's core business. This could explain the insignificant effects of fit on perceived CSR authenticity and corporate reputation, as well as the insignificant moderation effect. Fit may seem like a straightforward concept and is often defined in a similar manner; "the congruence or similarity between the social cause and a company's business" (Du et al., 2010, p.12). Many researchers theorize that it is more complex than presumed. For example, Bigné et al. (2012) distinguish between functional and image fit. Functional fit refers to similarity of the social cause and the type of products and services the company offers, while image fit refers to the similarity based on brand associations. They found functional fit to influence CSR perception in a direct manner, whereas image fit affected perceptions because of its positive influence on altruistic attributions (Bigné et al., 2012). Future studies might study the effects of the different types of fit on perceived CSR authenticity and corporate reputation, expanding the literature on CSR fit.

Another limitation that can be pointed out is the use of Amazon Mechanical Turk for the data collection. When using the crowdsourcing platform to gather a research sample, there are some threats to validity and generalizability that need to be addressed. One important threat to internal validity is inattentiveness from the subjects (Cheung et al., 2017).

The level of effort from respondents can differ, however, when some subjects do not attend to the experimental stimuli or instructions, manipulation and measurements might not work as intended by the researcher. Furthermore, the majority of the sample was highly educated, many respondents either finished a bachelor's or master's degree (79.8%). This factor might have biased the findings of this study. Future studies should aim at using a different sampling method, with a more equal distribution of educational level of the respondents.

6.3 Directions for future research

The current study provided insights into the influence of CSR communication, message aspects, and personal characteristics of consumers, on perceived CSR authenticity and corporate reputation. However, it has also provoked suggestions for future research that will expand the findings of this research. The first suggestion that could be explored in future studies would be studying the influence of different communication channels that companies use for their CSR communication. The corporate website was used as the communication channel in this study. Nevertheless, companies are increasingly using social media for their CSR communication (Sutton, 2016), as it facilitates interaction with stakeholders and pushes corporate openness and transparency. Researchers could therefore investigate the direct – or moderating influence of the communication channel that is being used.

Secondly, in addition to the independent variables and moderating variable of this study, the possible effects of socio-demographic variables such as country of origin or educational level could be studied. Moreover, investigating the moderating influence of personal characteristics of the participants other than social cause involvement could also be important. An influential consumer characteristic is skepticism towards CSR, which has been increasing in the last years (Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2012). It could therefore be important to study the effect of these personal characteristics since they can have implications for the formulation, application, and success of CSR engagement.

Lastly, the concept of CSR communication within the fashion industry could be explored further. The possible influence of other message aspects such as message style, framing or tone of voice could be studied as well. Given that communication about CSR engagement is crucial for its success, it is important to study the influence of several different aspects of it. This will aid in giving fashion companies recommendations regarding their CSR communication strategy.

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Appendix A

Qualtrics survey

Dear participant, Welcome and thank you for participating in this questionnaire. This questionnaire is part of the Master thesis by Kyara Durlinger, a Media & Business student at Erasmus University. The purpose is to get a better understanding of people's perception of companies' CSR activities.

CSR refers to Corporate Social Responsibility, which can be defined as "The voluntary integration of companies' social and ecological concerns into their business activities and their relationships with their stakeholders" (European Union, 2001).

Completing this questionnaire will take approximately 10 minutes. It consists of 20 questions and you will be asked to read a website page and a news article carefully.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. Please note that you are always free to omit a question. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used. Your identity will not be associated with your responses in any published format. Further, there are no correct or incorrect answers to the questions of this questionnaire.

By clicking next, you agree with the aforementioned terms.
If you have any questions, please contact Kyara Durlinger at 575137kd@student.eur.nl

Please answer these questions:

Q5 **In general, are you interested in fashion?**

◯ Yes (1)

◯ No (2)

Q6 **How familiar are you with the concept of CSR?**

○ Not familiar at all (1)

○ Slightly familiar (2)

○ Moderately familiar (3)

○ Quite familiar (4)

○ Very familiar (5)

You will now be shown two images, one is from the corporate website from the fashion brand and the other from an online newspaper.
Please carefully read the message on the website of the brand:

See Appendix B

Also carefully read the following news article posted by an international online newspaper:

See appendix C

Q22 Based on your understanding of the corporate statement and the news that you just read, please answer the questions below.

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
The company is being true to itself with its CSR actions. (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The CSR action is genuine (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The company's CSR action is in accordance with the company's values and beliefs (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This is a socially responsible company (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The company is concerned about improving the well-being of society (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q38 **Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:**

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
This is a company I have a good feeling about (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This is a company I trust (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This company has an overall good reputation (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This is a company I admire and respect (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q32 **The following questions will regard your personal and demographical information.   For you, the social cause promoted on the company's website…**

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	
is of little interest	○	○	○	○	○	○	is very interesting
is irrelevant	○	○	○	○	○	○	is relevant
means nothing to me	○	○	○	○	○	○	means a lot to me
is of no concern to me	○	○	○	○	○	○	is of concern to me
is not important	○	○	○	○	○	○	is important
doesn't matter to me	○	○	○	○	○	○	does matter to me

Q33 **How old are you?**

- ◯ 18-24 years old (1)

- ◯ 25-34 years old (2)

- ◯ 35-44 years old (3)

- ◯ 45-54 years old (4)

- ◯ 55-64 years old (5)

- ◯ 65+ years old   (6)

Q34 **What is your gender?**

- ◯ Male (1)

- ◯ Female (2)

- ◯ Non-binary / third gender (3)

- ◯ Prefer not to say (4)

Q35 **What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?**

- ◯ High school (1)

- ◯ Associate degree (2)

- ◯ Bachelor's degree (3)

- ◯ Master's degree (4)

- ◯ PHD (5)

Lastly, please answer these questions:

Based on your understanding of the corporate statement and the news article, did the company act on their CSR claims (walk their talk)?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

Do you think that the company's social responsibility action has a good fit with its core business?

○ Yes, the company's social responsibility action fits its products and services (1)

○ No, the company's social responsibility action does not fit its products and services (2)

Q52 Here is your survey code: ${e://Field/Random%20ID}

Copy this value to paste into MTurk.
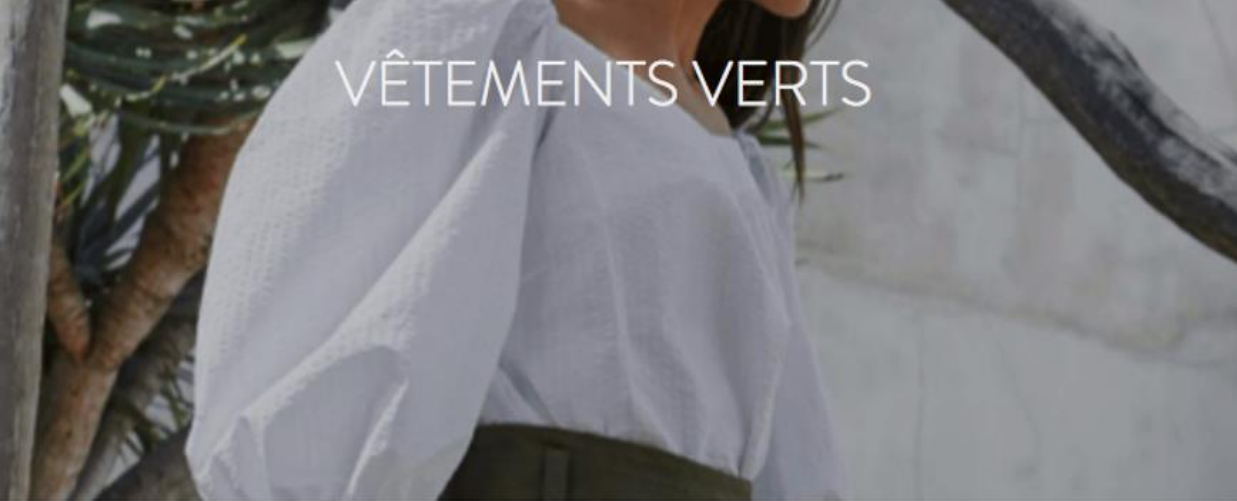
Q43 **This is the end of the questionnaire. Please click on the arrow below to complete it. Thank you for your participation!**
For any further questions and/ or comments about this study, please contact: Kyara Durlinger 575137@student.eur.nl Erasmus University Rotterdam

Appendix B

Corporate websites

Condition 1: consistent CSR talk and walk – high CSR fit

VÊTEMENTS VERTS

ABOUT US

Vêtements Verts started in 2018 with a clear mission: creating fashion in a sustainable and ethical way. Sustainability is at the core of everything we do - all our clothes are made from sustainable materials and we also have our local factory where we create your favourite pieces.

NEW INITIATIVE

As of this year, we have introduced a new initiative. Half of our unsold clothes will be donated to various homeless shelters and foundations. The other half will be recycled and reused. We have noticed an increase in excess stock last year, which has made it a challenge to recycle everything. Improving the planet has to be done step by step, and this will be our next, but definitely not our last!

Condition 2: consistent CSR talk and walk – low fit

VÊTEMENTS VERTS

ABOUT US

Vêtements Verts started in 2018 with a clear mission: creating fashion in a sustainable and ethical way. Sustainability is at the core of everything we do - all our clothes are made from sustainable materials and we also have our local factory where we create your favourite pieces.

NEW INITIATIVE

As of this year, we have introduced a new initiative. From now on, we will donate vital school supplies to children in developing countries each year. The donations will make up 10% of our profits. Rather than use intermediaries, we will take all items directly to ensure that all donated supplies reach those who really need them. The donations will be shared between several primary schools in India and Bangladesh. We are striving to support education and make a difference in people's lives!

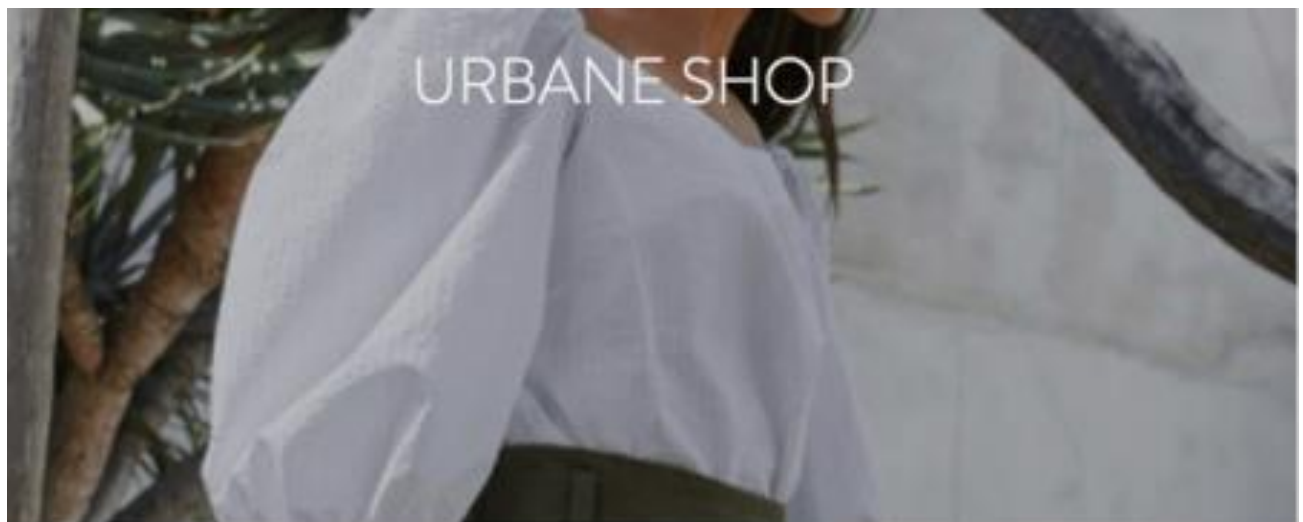Condition 3: inconsistent CSR talk and walk – high CSR fit
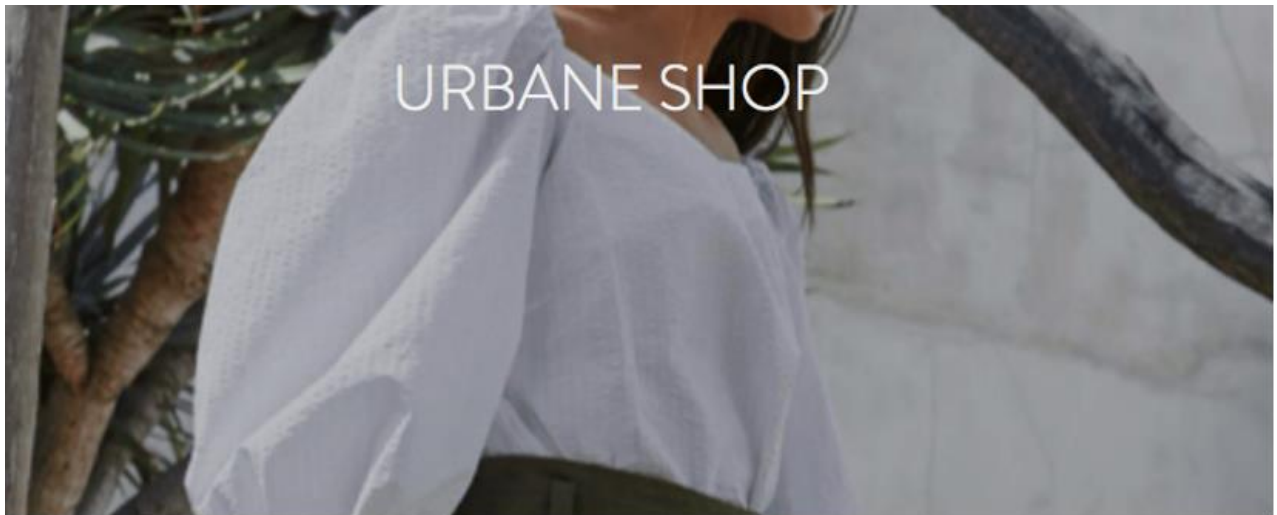
ABOUT US

Urbane Shop started in 2018 with a clear mission: making fashion affordable. Our customers are at the heart of our unique business model. We provide quick-to-market fashion, and we are known for delivering the season's most wanted styles for everyone.

NEW INITIATIVE

As of this year, we are introducing a new initiative. We have noticed an increase in excess stock last year. That's why we will be donating half of our unsold clothes to various homeless shelters and foundations. We aim at contributing to a better world!

Condition 4: inconsistent CSR talk and walk – low CSR fit

URBANE SHOP

ABOUT US

Urbane Shop started in 2018 with a clear mission: making fashion affordable. Our customers are at the heart of our unique business model. We provide quick-to-market fashion, and we are known for delivering the season's most wanted styles for everyone.

NEW INITIATIVE

As of this year, we are introducing a new initiative. From now on, we will use 10% of our profits to donate vital school supplies to children in developing countries. Rather than use intermediaries, we will take all items directly to ensure that all supplies reach those who really need them. The donations will be shared between several primary schools in India and Bangladesh. We are striving to support education and make a difference in people's lives!

Appendix C

Online news articles

Condition 1: consistent CSR talk and walk – high CSR fit

Vêtements Vert donates $1 million dollar worth of excess stock

March 12, 2021

From the start, Vêtements Vert vows to contribute to a greener future. Last week, the brand confirmed their $1 million dollar donation.

The upcoming fashion company has been growing in popularity in the last year. This has not only been due to their fashionable clothing lines, but also their goal: a more sustainable world. They have had several sustainable initiatives in the past 2 years, including making their clothes from environmental-friendly materials and planting a tree for each purchase. The brand promised in 2020 with a new initiative to donate a share of their excess stock, which they confirmed last week. Let's hope they will continue these initiatives!

Condition 2: consistent CSR talk and walk – low CSR fit

Vêtements Vert donates $1 million dollar worth of school supplies

March 12, 2021

From the start, Vêtements Vert vows to contribute to a more sustainable and ethical future. Last week, the brand confirmed a huge donation of school supplies.

The upcoming fashion company has been growing in popularity in the last year. This has not only been due to their fashionable clothing lines, but also their goal: improving the world. They have had several sustainable initiatives in the past 2 years, including making their clothes from environmental-friendly materials and planting a tree for each purchase. The brand promised in 2020, with a new initiative, to donate school supplies to children in both India and Bangladesh. Last week, the brand confirmed that they already donated $1 million dollar in school supplies. Let's hope they will continue these initiatives!

Condition 3: inconsistent CSR talk and walk – high CSR fit

Urbane Shop burns clothes and bags worth $1 million dollar

March 12, 2021

Urbane Shop, the brand with fast-changing trends and affordable fashion vowed to donate part of their increasing stock. However, they have been found to destroy most of it.

The upcoming fashion company has been growing in popularity in the last year. This has not only been due to their fashionable clothing lines, but also their goal: making fashion affordable for everyone. Increased excess stock has become an issue for clothing companies since trends keep changing more rapidly. For this reason, Urbane Shop introduced an initiative in 2020: donating half of their unsold clothing to homeless shelters and foundations. Last week, a report came out from which we can make out they do not live up to their claims. The report stated that almost 80% of their stock got burned, while only 20% got donated. The brand has not communicated about it yet.

Condition 4: inconsistent CSR talk and walk – low CSR fit

The price for low prices at Urbane Shop

March 12, 2021

Urbane Shop, the brand with fast-changing trends and affordable fashion vowed for supporting education and making a difference in people's lives with their new initiative: donating vital school supplies to children in developing countries. Last week, accusations and proof of using child labour came to light.

The upcoming fashion company has been growing in popularity in the last year. This has not only been due to their fashionable clothing lines, but also their goal: making fashion affordable for everyone. Many people wanting to keep up with the fashion trends for a low price is driving clothing companies to produce their collections at a rapid pace and at low cost. Several other companies have been accused of using child labour in their factories, and now Urbane Shop as well. These accusations also come with proof: pictures and eyewitness stories of underage children working in horrible conditions in their factories in Bangladesh. Are they really making a change in people's lives? The brand has not communicated about it yet.