

CSR transparency and consumers' outcomes

Does transparency in CSR of fashion industries matters? A quantitative research on how transparent CSR communication influence consumers' eWOM and purchasing intentions.

Student Name: Lamprini Kranioti

Student Number: 625316

Supervisor: Dr. Anne-Marie van Prooijen

Master Media Studies - Media & Business

Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication

Erasmus University Rotterdam

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ABSTRACT

The rise of consumers' awareness of social and environmental issues forced organizations to act in a more sustainable way, including CSR in their core business strategies. Fashion industries have been charged several times for irresponsible and unethical practices in relation to the environment and society, and thus consumers tend to be more cautious with their CSR practices. Effective CSR communication is vital for fashion industries in order to achieve positive consumers' behaviors. The level of transparency in CSR activities of corporations can lead to either positive or negative consumers' outcomes. The aim of this research is to identify to what extent transparency in CSR communication of fashion industries influence consumers' intentions to participate in positive or negative eWOM, as well as their purchasing intentions. Furthermore, this study focuses on the mediating effects of trust and consumer-company-identification (CCI) in the relationship mentioned above.

To answer the research question, an online experiment was conducted, using a unifactorial experimental design with three conditions (high CSR transparency condition, low CSR transparency condition, control condition). The sample of this research consisted of 184 respondents. The results showed that high CSR transparency of fashion industries lead to higher consumers' positive eWOM intentions, compared to low CSR transparency. However, no significant relationships were found for CSR transparency conditions with consumers' negative eWOM and purchasing intentions. Furthermore, a full mediation of trust was found in the relationship between CSR transparency and positive eWOM intentions. For negative eWOM and purchasing intentions, no mediating effects of trust were found in relation to CSR transparency. CCI has not been found as a mediator in the relationship between CSR transparency with eWOM and purchasing intentions. The findings of this research add significant knowledge to the existing literature of CSR communication in the fashion context. They also provide remarkable insights for managers and marketers in the fashion industry on how to design their CSR communication strategies on social media, in order to achieve positive consumers' outcomes regarding the brand, through transparency. More research is needed to discover more extensively the relationship between CSR transparency, eWOM, purchasing intentions, trust and CCI.

KEYWORDS: CSR, transparency, eWOM, purchasing intention, CCI

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1. Introduction

1.1 The growth of sustainability, CSR and ethical consumers

“The future of humanity and indeed all life on Earth depends on us” said David Attenborough, one of the most popular naturalists, in an effort to raise awareness on the issue of climate change (BBC, 2020, para 2). There is no doubt that at the moment, climate change is more visible than ever, and thus there is a rapid growth of interest on environmental issues by individuals. According to research conducted by Statista, 37% of individuals are indicating that climate change is the number one environmental problem that the world faces, followed by air pollution and excessive products’ waste (Jaganmohan, 2022). With the rise of environmental issues, the interest on the topic of sustainability has increased in an effort to tackle the negative effects of human activity on nature. According to Lo and Ha-Brookshire (2018) sustainability is related to responsible behaviors among corporations and individuals with the aim to provide a safe future on the planet.

Consumers’ awareness on the topic of sustainability had risen significantly during the last decades, contributing in the establishment of ethical consumerism. Ethical consumers are those who are concerned about how ethical are the values of a corporation and purchase products that do not damage the environment or specific groups of the society (Freestone & McGoldrick, 2007). Ethical consumerism has risen more during Covid-19, forcing corporations to behave in a more responsible way. According to an international study carried by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), authorized by WWF, during the past five years, there has been a 71% increase in searches for sustainable products by consumers, which is keeping up to grow due to Covid-19 (World Wildlife Fund, 2021). Over the years, large corporations have responded to this wide demand of consumers by integrating more sustainable practices in their overall strategic Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) plans. CSR is related to companies’ ability to balance their activities related to the environment and society with their financial issues and some of the activities included in CSR are sustainability, philanthropy, corporate governance and accountability (Anuradha & Bagali, 2015).

In the fashion sector, industries tend to increase their CSR efforts and adopt sustainable practices in their day-to-day operations, due to their detrimental impacts on the environment (Colucci et al., 2020). Despite the progress that the fashion industry has

achieved in relation to sustainability during the past years, it still has a long way to go. Michael- Stanley Jones, a board member of the “UN Alliance for Sustainable Fashion”, had stated that “The urge to sell more and get consumers to buy more is still in the DNA of the industry” (Pucker, 2022, para. 7). The aforementioned statement can be also confirmed by a report published by McKinsey & Company in cooperation with Global Fashion Agenda. The report indicated that fashion industries in 2018 were responsible for approximately 2.1 billion tons of global carbon contamination, which is equal to 4% of the total carbon impact on the planet (Berg et al., 2020).

Hence, consumers’ demands regarding CSR practices of the fashion industries have increased compared to the past, as they became more aware regarding issues related to the environment and society (Khandual & Pradhan, 2019). One aspect that is considered as crucial in relation to consumer’s perception regarding the sustainable efforts of fashion industries, is transparency (Pucker, 2022). Transparency is related to the disclosure of honest and sincere information about the operations of an organization, increasing credibility and trustworthiness (Hendijani Zadeh et al., 2021). In relation to fashion industries, transparency is usually correlated with the publishing of decent information regarding supply chains, including the environmental impact of their manufacturing processes (Amed et al., 2019). But can the level of transparency in CSR communication of fashion industries impact specific consumer’s behaviors?

As CSR plays a fundamental role in the operations of fashion industries, due to the high interest of stakeholders in this topic, the way these companies communicate their sustainable practices could influence consumers’ perceptions about the brand as well as their behavior in a positive or negative way. Broadly, the integration of CSR activities by corporations contributes to the creation of favorable consumer responses, such as buying intentions and positive word-of-mouth intentions about a brand (Youn & Cho, 2021). Generally, consumers use social media platforms to share information about a product or a company through electronic-word-of-mouth (eWOM), according to their positive or negative experiences with the brand (Fu et al., 2015). EWOM is related with negative or positive messages from customers for a firm or a product which are spread through the Internet (Hu & Kim, 2018).

Academic interest on the topics of CSR, eWOM and purchasing intentions have been raised throughout the last years, as many scholars had researched these topics. In relation to CSR, prior studies focused mostly on its positive impacts toward consumers’ attitudes and evaluations of firms’ CSR, as well as in relation to corporate reputation (Ajayi & Mmutle,

2021; Eberle et al., 2013). Furthermore, several studies had researched the motives behind companies' engagement to CSR (Kim & Lee, 2013; Kim, 2014), as well as in relation to different CSR initiatives on consumer's responses (Groza et al., 2011; Kim & Austin, 2020). Moreover, many researchers have addressed the positive effects of stakeholders' engagement on CSR to eWOM intentions (Chu et al., 2020; Fatma et al., 2020), and the impacts of CSR activities on consumers' purchasing intentions (Gupta et al., 2021; Lee & Shin, 2010). Regarding eWOM intentions, academic literature focused mostly on its motives and its relationship with consumers' buying intentions (Chu & Kim, 2011; Hu & Kim, 2018).

Despite the rapid growth of scholars' interest in the aforementioned topics, there is still limited research related to CSR communication and transparency, as well as on its effects on stakeholders' perceptions and behaviors (Kim & Lee, 2018). In addition, empirical research regarding the impacts of transparent CSR messages of specific organizations is still scarce (Lee & Comello, 2018). Especially for the fashion sector, the research related to CSR communication is very limited. Transparency in the communication of CSR efforts in social media can be very important for brand's reputation and consumers' perceptions, thus it can be also an influential factor for consumers' behaviors. Hence, this study aims to address the aforementioned gap in the literature, by answering the following research question: To what extent does CSR transparency of fashion industries influence consumers' positive or negative eWOM and purchasing intentions?

1.2 Theoretical and social relevance

As mentioned above, this research's goal is to add fundamental knowledge to the literature of CSR in relation to consumers, considering that most of the studies until now are related with the relationship of CSR as a whole with specific consumer responses, and not to the way corporations communicate their CSR practices. Hence, the theoretical relevance of this study is based on several aspects. Firstly, the academic relevance lies in the fact that there is still limited knowledge about the effects of CSR communication, especially in social media platforms (Dunn & Hurness, 2018). Apart from that, the literature of CSR communication on social media in relation to specific consumers' responses, like eWOM and purchasing intentions, is remaining insufficient in specific sectors (Gupta et al., 2021). Secondly, the subject of transparency has been discussed in the literature mainly in the level of "business transparency", focusing on organizational transparency as a whole (Holland et al., 2018; Kundeliene & Leitoniene, 2015), and not on CSR transparency (Kim & Lee, 2018). In detail,

the studies found in the literature in relation to CSR and transparency are very limited and are restricted mostly to the disclosure of information through CSR reports (Garcia-Torea et al., 2017; Hamza & Jarboui, 2021). However, studies in relation to transparency in CSR communication through social media platforms are still deficient. Thirdly, the fashion sector is also insufficiently researched with regard to CSR, as most of the research in this topic is related to other fields, such as the banking sector (Gupta et al., 2021). Taking into account the aforementioned statements, a study examining how different levels of transparency in CSR communication of fashion industries could influence consumers' eWOM and purchasing intention could add fundamental knowledge in the existing literature to the overall subject of CSR communication, as well as in relation to the fashion sector, which is strongly related with CSR and transparency.

Apart from the scientific relevance, this research has also a societal relevance. Generally, transparency in communication is considered as a necessary aspect in the fashion industries, due to its negative environmental impact, as well as a high consumers' demand. In detail, transparency has become essential for the supply chain processes of fashion industries, as consumers are looking for brands that they can trust (Amed et al., 2019). Covid-19 also reinforced consumers' perceptions toward the necessity of transparency in the sustainable practices of corporations. According to a survey conducted during the pandemic by "McKinsey & Company", 70% of consumers have a positive relation with transparent brands that they trust, while 75% are more willing to purchase a product from a trusted firm (Granskog et al., 2020). Thus, within this research, essential knowledge could be gained for specific consumers' responses, which can be used by organizations for the creation of more transparent communication strategies. Furthermore, transparency is an aspect that fashion industries still refuse to integrate in their communication tactics. According to the Fashion Transparency Index 2021 report, the rise of transparency in relation to fashion brands' social and environmental efforts is still slow-moving, as most of the brands in the fashion sector worldwide are not disclosing enough information about their supply chain processes (Wightman-Stone, n.d.). Hence, this research could contribute to gain the awareness of managers of fashion brands regarding a topic that is still a bit controversial, but necessary for this specific sector.

To answer the research question, a quantitative method is used in order to examine the relationship between the independent with the dependent variables. The collection of the data was made by sharing the online experiment through social media platforms and specifically through Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram. For the purposes of the research, a fictitious

fashion brand is used through different experimental conditions. In detail, participants are exposed to a Facebook post from the imaginary company, launching a new sustainable collection, but the level of the message transparency in each condition is different. The aim of the study is to understand how different levels of transparency can influence consumers' behavior. Following the manipulation check, participants are exposed to questions related to the dependent variables, eWOM and purchasing intentions, as well as to the mediators, trust and consumers-company-identification. Age, gender, educational level and income are used as control variables for this study.

1.3 Chapters outline

The goal of this research is to identify how different levels of CSR transparency of fashion industries can influence consumers' behaviors and specifically positive or negative eWOM and purchasing intentions. The chapters of this study aimed to provide a clear overview of all the steps that had been taken to answer the research question. Following the introduction, the second chapter includes the theoretical framework, which is considered as the base for the whole study. In this chapter, the topic of sustainable fashion as well as the variables CSR transparency, eWOM and purchasing intentions are further explained. Furthermore, the variables trust and consumers-company-identification (CCI) are introduced, which are tested as mediators in the relation between the independent and the dependent variables. Previous research is used to introduce the hypothesis of this study, which are presented in each section of this second chapter. In the third chapter, the methodology of this study is presented. In detail, it includes why a quantitative method is suitable to answer the research question, as well as the sampling method and the demographics of the sample. In the same chapter the procedure of the survey is presented, followed by the operationalization of the variables used, while the validity and reliability of the study is also explained. Then, the fourth chapter is introduced which includes the results section of the study. In this section, several analyses are presented, including ANOVA and regression analysis to examine the relationships between the variables. Furthermore, in the same section the hypotheses are rejected or accepted according to the findings of the analyses. The fifth chapter, focuses on a discussion of the results of the analyses, taking into account existing literature and a clear answer of the research question is provided. The fifth chapter also includes the theoretical and practical implications, the limitations of the study, as well as suggestions for future research. Lastly, in the final chapter a conclusion is provided.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Sustainable Fashion

Consumers' demands on sustainability of the fashion industries are on the rise during the last decades, as they are more attentive to environmental subjects, and thus they expect fashion industries to act in a responsible way. However, the adoption of ethical and sustainable practices from the fashion industries is generally considered as a challenging process (Clark, 2008). Fashion retailers have been accused several times for its unethical practices in relation to the environment and unequal working conditions. Regarding the environmental impacts of fashion industries, most of the hazardous effects consist of the production process of the fashion items, such as water pollution and consumption as well as carbon footprint (Sanad, 2021). In detail, fashion retailers are responsible for 17-20% of water pollution globally, and for 10% of the carbon emissions worldwide, which are related to the production process and supply chains (Brewer, 2019). In addition, the excessing waste of clothing in fashion industries is leading to the creation of large amounts of rubbish heaps, which significantly increase the pollution of the environment (Brewer, 2019). Regarding the working conditions, as reported by Ethical Fashion Forum, above half of the fashion items today are made in unfair conditions for its workers, without safety measures (Haug & Busch, 2015). Most of these unethical practices in the fashion world are generally related to the fast fashion industries. Fast fashion is characterized by the quick response of brands in the fast-moving changes of fashion trends, by offering new designs at low prices within a short period of time (Hall, 2017). Some examples of fast fashion industries are Zara, H&M and Fashion Nova.

With the rise of consumers' consciousness regarding the effects of fashion industries, sustainable fashion was generated, which is also referred to as ethical fashion. Other terms used to describe this phenomenon are "environmental", "eco-friendly" and "green" fashion (Haug & Busch, 2015). According to Joergens (2006) ethical fashion is related with fashion industries, which integrate fair trade attitudes and ethical working conditions, by decreasing the harm to the environment and its workers. Sustainable fashion is generally related to the slow fashion movement, a quite new concept which promotes sustainability within the fashion sector and it is considered as the opposite of fast fashion (McNeill & Snowdon, 2019).

During the last decades, luxury and non-luxury fashion industries have started to adopt more ethical practices in an effort to provide ethical working conditions and reduce their

impact on the environment. Sustainable fashion and CSR are closely related. Specifically, sustainability is significant for any company which aims to reach its goals (Todeschini et al., 2017) and nowadays fashion industries tend to include their sustainable actions through their CSR practices (Nguyen, 2020). One of the fast fashion industries which had integrated sustainable practices in their CSR is the Swedish fashion brand H&M. Specifically, H&M had launched in the past several sustainable collections, such as the “Conscious Collection”, which consisted of apparel made by recycled and green materials (Yang et al., 2017).

On the other hand, several luxury fashion brands had also included sustainability in their main CSR objectives. Stella McCartney is a luxury brand which considers sustainability as a core value of the company (Jones & Jones, 2018). However, the way fashion firms communicate their sustainable practices, under the umbrella of CSR, is significant for consumers’ awareness of the brand and thus fashion industries have to adopt effective communication strategies. According to Kong et al. (2021), the sustainable marketing of luxury and non-luxury fashion brands can lead to higher brand evaluations of consumers, especially when the brand is perceived as ethical and transparent. Precise information and clear messages in the sustainability communication of fashion retailers are essential for the decision-making process of consumers, when it comes to ethical products (Blazquez et al., 2019).

2.2 CSR communication

The concept of CSR is strongly associated with the stakeholders of a company. Chandler (2020) highlighted that CSR is not only connected with the need of corporations to fulfill the expectations of their stakeholders, but also to the capability of stakeholders to keep corporations accountable for their activities. Within CSR, corporations implement practices which have a positive effect on its stakeholders, and in this way, they can increase customers’ loyalty (Martínez & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013). Companies are integrating CSR practices in their business strategies for multiple reasons, which may have different impacts to stakeholders’ perception. Regarding fashion industries, the level of CSR engagement is related with the type of the brand, as well as its size, as large companies are more willing to integrate CSR activities regarding social and environmental issues in their core strategies, than small ones (Colucci et al., 2020). However, in both cases, CSR engagement is closely related to the pressure from consumers to behave in an ethical and sustainable way (Colucci et al., 2020), and it can have both positive and negative effects on corporations depending on

their perceived motives (Teah et al., 2021). In many cases, consumers tend to doubt the true CSR motives of organizations, making effective CSR communication more essential for its stakeholders.

CSR communication refers to an effort from companies to provide consistent messages to their stakeholders in a way that they take into account the consolidation of the concerns regarding social and environmental problems, stakeholder's needs and business operations (Podnar, 2008). The academic literature correlates CSR communication with different initiatives, such as public relations (PR) and marketing communication (Golob et al., 2013; Clark, 2000). In detail, CSR communication and PR are closely related as, for both of these concepts, companies aim to achieve a positive brand image and corporate position (Jarolimek & Weder, 2016). On the other hand, in line with marketing techniques, with CSR communication, companies promote their responsible practices in an effort to convince consumers for their positive environmental and societal influence (Golob et al., 2013). In the same context, green marketing is a practice that is used to promote CSR activities regarding environmental sustainability and it is beneficial for the enhancement of the organizational performance (Zhang et al., 2022). This type of advertising is also referred to in the literature as "environmental marketing" (Song-Turner & Polonsky, 2016; Yang et al., 2013). Environmental marketing practices can be a competitive advantage for brands in the market and they are related with the promotion of green products, as well to environmental claims, such as activist claims regarding environmental issues (Stall-Meadows & Davey, 2013).

CSR communication is generally considered as a double-edge sword, as it can be both challenging and beneficial for the brands. To begin with, when consumers are aware of CSR initiatives of an organization, they can adopt positive views and behavior. Golob (2016) has stated that CSR communication is strongly correlated with positive brand reputation, as it refers to the way companies share details about CSR activities to its stakeholders. According to Du et al. (2010), CSR activities could contribute to the positive stakeholder's attitudes toward the company, such as purchasing behavior, eWOM intentions and in general to more positive brand image, and thus, it is significant for organizations to increase stakeholder's consciousness regarding their CSR activities, through successful communication. Lai et al. (2010) argued that CSR knowledge is necessary for a brand's high performance, as it enhances corporate reputation and brand equity.

On the other hand, CSR communication can be a demanding process for corporations. The most significant challenges that a corporation faces when communicating CSR, is consumers' skepticism toward brands' CSR efforts, as well as unfavorable CSR practices (Du

et al., 2010). Factors which can contribute to overcome these challenges is to provide consistent messages to its stakeholders, by ensuring that CSR issues fit to the company objectives, as well as to use social media platforms for CSR communication (Du et al., 2010). Social media platforms, as online tools, can be very beneficial to the communication of CSR, as they can increase the interactivity between the brand and its consumers (Sreejesh et al., 2018). Specifically, social media, in contrast to traditional media, provides the possibility of two-way communication which enables an open dialogue between brands and stakeholders (Chen & Zhang, 2009; Dunn & Harness, 2018). Within this type of CSR communication, consumers perceive the information of the brand as more authentic, especially when the company is considered as committed to its CSR initiatives (Dunn & Harness, 2018). However, the use of social media platforms globally has raised the number of senders of the CSR messages, and this might lead to more criticism from the part of the consumers, in cases that brands do not communicate CSR activities in a proper way. The lack of transparency and disclosure in the communication of CSR messages are crucial factors that can create stakeholders' backlashes and generate a sense of hypocrisy (Andersen et al., 2016).

2.3 Transparency in CSR communication

A successful CSR communication strategy consists of many dimensions which are widely related to consumers' expectations. Kim and Ferguson (2016) identified key dimensions about CSR communication which are related to stakeholder's expectations naming as "informativeness", "third-party endorsement", "personal relevance", "consistency", "self-efficacy", "self-promotional message tone" and "transparency" (p.552). The concept of transparency is usually correlated with the disclosure of both positive and negative information about CSR practices and it can decrease the skepticism of consumers by enhancing trust and accountability of a company (Kim & Ferguson, 2016). CSR transparency refers to the tendency of organizations to provide clear information regarding their CSR practices in order all the stakeholders can acquire the messages that fit into their interests (Dubbink et al., 2008). Baraibar-Diez and Sotorrío (2016) provide a clear definition of corporate social transparency which is related to "the availability of relevant, understandable and timely social information by the firm in order to allow stakeholders to make rational decisions" (p. 9). In relation to fashion industries, transparency is usually correlated with the publishing of decent information regarding supply chains, including the environmental impact of their manufacturing processes (Amed et al., 2019).

Many companies worldwide have been accused of lack of transparency in their CSR communication, as they provide inconsistent messages for their CSR tactics and as a result, they confuse its stakeholders about their CSR performance (Andersen et al., 2016). In relation to environmental issues, this phenomenon is often described with the term “greenwashing”, which refers to the misleading communication from companies regarding their environmental performance (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). Information transparency in CSR can eliminate greenwashing practices, contributing simultaneously to the increasement of the product value for consumers and thus to the rise of business profits (Wu et al., 2020). Furthermore, consumers’ CSR knowledge is directly influenced by CSR transparency, and as a result corporate reputation is increased (Kim, 2017). By being transparent, corporations share information that is relevant to stakeholders’ needs, and in this way the latter can evaluate the information provided, and keep the company accountable (Coombs & Holladay, 2013).

Transparency in CSR is not only related to the amount of the provided information, but also to its quality. Rawlins (2008) related organizational transparency with the encouragement of participation of stakeholders, by comprehending the provided information in a way that they find it useful and can make decisions. Thus, CSR messages have to be constructed strategically by companies, with the aim to enhance the value and transparency of the communication (Lee & Comello, 2019). Consumers are often having doubts if CSR efforts of industries are authentic or profit-oriented, and transparency contributes to this reduction of skepticism through CSR communication (Kim & Ferguson, 2018; Lee & Comello, 2019). This process is significant to the creation of positive consumers’ behavior, as it positively influences the relationship between the company and consumers (Kang & Hustvedt, 2013).

2.4 Consumers’ outcomes

2.4.1 eWOM intentions

When consumers gain a better understanding of fashion brands’ CSR activities, they might be more willing to respond to these efforts in a positive or negative way. CSR is a fundamental factor that can raise the engagement of consumers with the brand, by evoking word-of-mouth (WOM) behaviors and the provision of feedback related to responsible practices (Abbas et al. 2018). WOM has been examined by a variety of researchers, and it refers to a directly unofficial way of communication between individuals about different kinds of products, services or firms and it can also be a way of marketing for organizations (Huang et al., 2011;

Viglia et al., 2015). WOM has been proved as a very influential factor for consumers' buying intentions (Hennig-Thurau, 2004). In relation to CSR communication, the level of message credibility can influence the perception of consumers about the brand, as well as their intentions to share positive or negative information or reviews (Dalla-Pria & Rodriguez-de-Dios, 2022).

With the growth of technology, the term electronic-word-of-mouth (eWOM) was generated (Hennig-Thurau, 2004; Hu & Kim, 2018). Compared to WOM, eWOM can be spread quicker and it is more accessible due to the online media, and thus can affect consumers' behavior at a higher rate (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). The communication of eWOM in web-based platforms can incorporate both positive or negative reviews about a product or a brand (Hennig-Thurau, 2004). Thus, it is vital for brands to adopt effective and transparent communication plans to benefit from the positive outcomes of eWOM and avoid online criticism (Dunn & Grimes, 2022). Social networking sites (SNSs) are platforms which provide multiple possibilities for companies to communicate online their CSR activities, with Facebook being among the most used for organizational communication (Fatma et al., 2020). Social media platforms can lead to eWOM consumers' behaviors, which include specific reactions, such as liking, commenting, sharing information regarding brands' CSR efforts (Chu et al., 2020). Facebook, as a social media platform, offers great facilities for collaboration, as it includes multiple features of Web 2.0 such as illustration, content creation and consumers' evaluations (Martinez et al., 2021).

Consumers tend to have more favorable behaviors for companies that communicate effectively their CSR practices through social media platforms, due to the interactivity of these platforms, which could lead eventually to positive eWOM behaviors (Fatma et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the type of CSR activity is also significant in the adoption of positive or negative eWOM. For instance, activities which are related to ethical and sustainable practices are more effective in the spread of positive eWOM (Youn & Cho, 2021). In relation to fashion brands, consistency in CSR communication, as well as the content of the ad message, plays a vital role in the adoption of positive eWOM behaviors from consumers (Youn & Cho, 2021). Furthermore, when a brand is transparent and responsible, positive consumers' attitudes can be enhanced, such as positive WOM behaviors (Choi et al., 2018; Chu et al., 2020). In line with this statement, Choi et al. (2018) agreed that transparency between organizations and its stakeholders on social media could positively influence eWOM intentions of consumers', as in this way they perceive the brand as trustworthy and credible.

In contrast, when consumers perceive a brand's CSR communication as inconsistent and non-transparent, they can have more negative feelings about the company, and thus adopt negative attitudes. Consumers usually adopt positive eWOM and purchasing intentions for firms that have high corporate reputation, while on the contrary they embrace negative behavior when they are dissatisfied with a brand (Chu & Chen, 2019). Consumers who perceive an irresponsible behavior of corporations regarding their social and environmental practices, are more willing to spread negative eWOM (Mar García-de los Salmones, 2020). In addition, consumers are more likely to share an unpleasant experience with a product or a company on social media, rather than reward the brand for their favorable practices (Park & Lee, 2009). Thus, it can be assumed that if consumers perceive a company's CSR communication as non-transparent, they might be more willing to spread negative information about the brand. Consumers tend to spread negative messages about a product or a brand if they truly believe that it does not meet their expectations, damaging in this way the brand's reputation, through the dissemination of negative messages (Liu & Keng, 2014). Hence the non-disclosure of information regarding sustainability efforts, as well as dishonest sustainable practices, such as greenwashing, can cause unfavorable behaviors from consumers (Kong et al., 2021). The aforementioned statements regarding positive and negative eWOM intentions, has led to the following hypotheses:

H1: Individuals' positive eWOM intention will be higher in the high CSR transparency condition of the fashion industry, compared to the low and control CSR transparency conditions.

H2: Individuals' negative eWOM intention will be higher in the low CSR transparency condition of the fashion industry, compared to the high and control CSR transparency conditions.

2.4.2 Purchasing intentions

The consumption of ethical products is a complicated process as there is generally a gap between the environmental concerns of consumers and their actual intention to purchase eco-friendly products (Chan & Wong, 2012). Consumers' purchasing intentions refer to their readiness to pay for a product or a service (Zhang et al., 2020). Compared to other sectors, ethical fashion consumption is rarer, as consumers are not directly affected by the positive outcomes of this choice, and thus they are less committed to sustainable fashion products (Chan & Wong, 2012). A factor that can overcome this hesitance for purchasing sustainable

and ethical fashion is knowledge about responsible practices of fashion industries. In detail, consumers' knowledge about ethical practices of fashion brands can influence their behavior toward the brand, by enhancing positive attitudes, beliefs and purchasing intentions (Shen et al., 2012). Hence, consumers who receive sufficient information about the CSR practices tend to reward the fashion brand. According to Manchiraju and Sadachar (2014), if consumers are aware about sustainable information of a product, they are more willing to purchase it, even with a high price.

Regarding CSR communication, purchasing intention can be reinforced by consumers' exposure to CSR practices in social media, as when consumers are aware of the firms' CSR activities, they can be more willing to buy a product. The construction of a "sustainable image" through CSR communication in social media creates positive evaluations of the brand and reinforces consumers' purchasing intentions (Gupta et al., 2021). Consumers tend to reward companies more which support social rather than environmental issues, and this is associated with the lack of awareness of the outcomes of corporate green efforts (Lee & Shin, 2010). Hence, the disclosure of information about the results of brands' sustainable practices is fundamental for consumers' buying intention. However, apart from the lack of information, consumers demand credibility in CSR messages in order to purchase a sustainable product, as they are generally cautious of environmental claims (Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018). Consumers' perception of transparency in CSR activities is essential for the adoption of a positive attitude toward a brand (Kang & Hustvedt, 2014). To be precise, consumers tend to be more willing to purchase products for industries that are perceived transparent (Kang & Hustvedt, 2014). The provision of transparent information about manufacturing and production processes contributes to ethical fashion consumerism, as it can increase the consumers' awareness of the brand (Shen et al., 2012). Hence, from the above arguments it can be assumed that consumers' intentions to buy a sustainable fashion product are widely related with the level of perceived transparency in CSR communication or the brand as a whole. Taking into account the aforementioned statements, the following hypothesis is going to be tested in this research:

H3: Individuals' purchasing intention will be higher in the high CSR transparency condition of the fashion industry, compared to the low and control CSR transparency conditions.

2.5 Trust

In line with the above statements, when consumers receive transparent messages, they tend to trust the brand more and thus adopt positive brand image and attitudes. Trust in relation to CSR is described as stakeholders' belief that a company is actually socially responsible (Bögel, 2015). Consumers' trust in brands' CSR activities has been proved generally low. Especially for previous stigmatized companies or for companies with a negative brand image, the development of consumers' trust is challenging (Bögel, 2015). Consumers' trust is fundamental for the creation of brand loyalty, as it contributes to a long-term positive relationship between corporations and stakeholders (Chun et al., 2021; Huo et al., 2022). Regarding environmental sustainability, Chen (2010) defined green trust as "a willingness to depend on a product, service, or brand based on the belief or expectation resulting from its credibility, benevolence, and ability about its environmental performance" (p. 312). The satisfaction of consumers on green products is a significant factor that can influence green trust (Chen & Chang, 2013).

In relation to fashion, studies have shown that in general consumers do not trust sustainable fashion industries, as they are suspicious of their true motives (Joergens, 2006). This can be explained by the fact that many fashion brands have been accused of greenwashing practices, and as a result consumers are more cautious in their sustainable fashion choices. The communication tactics of corporations play a crucial role in the trust building, in the level of consistency of what they communicate and what they actually do in relation to CSR (Kim, 2017). Corporations which communicate deceptive environmental messages tend to be perceived as less trustworthy by consumers (Chun et al., 2021). In general, consumers are more willing to engage with a brand, when they perceive it as sincere in their CSR communication. Brand transparency and brand trust are closely related. In detail, when corporate transparency is increased, consumers' trust of the brand is higher, which then leads to positive consumer outcomes (Kim, 2017; Kong et al., 2021).

The level of brand trust affects consumers' responses in a negative or positive way. In detail, trust has been widely considered as a mediator in the relation between corporations and consumers (Kang & Hustvedt, 2014). Specifically, positive WOM and purchasing intentions can be enhanced by brand trust, as consumers are more willing to advocate for a brand if they perceive it as credible (Kang & Hustvedt, 2014). When consumers trust a brand, they tend to be more committed to its products, and as a result, they look for ways to interact with it and share positive experiences with others (Huo et al., 2022). Furthermore, consumers

prefer to buy products from more trusted brands, as in this way they are feeling more secure for their choices (Huo et al., 2022). Perceived quality of a green product is fundamental in the trust building among corporations and consumers (Chen & Chang, 2013). In contrast, when consumers distrust a brand, they are very strict regarding their social and environmental efforts. Green marketing efforts confuse consumers and make them distrust the brands if they are dishonest (Paço & Reis, 2012). In addition, consumers are often afraid of not making the right choices regarding sustainable products. The perceived risk is a significant factor in the decision-making process, as it combines a high level of uncertainty and a fear of unpleasant outcomes (Chen & Chang, 2013). Low levels of brand trust can reinforce the sense of risk in the buying process. According to Kang and Hustvedt (2014), transparency of organizations strengthens the trust of consumers which contributes to consumer's intention to spread positive messages about the brand, as well as to their purchasing intention. The above statements have led to the following hypothesis:

H4a: The relationship between CSR transparency and positive eWOM intentions will be mediated by trust.

H4b: The relationship between CSR transparency and negative eWOM intentions will be mediated by trust.

H4c: The relationship between CSR transparency and purchasing intention will be mediated by trust.

2.6 Consumer Company Identification (CCI)

Another element that strengthens the relationship between companies and consumers is the level of consumers' identification. Consumer company identification (CCI) is described by Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) as "the relationship between the company and consumers which is encouraged by the satisfaction of consumer's needs" (p.77). This term is widely discussed by academics in relation to social identity theory and organizational identification, to describe the reason why consumers respond positively to brands' efforts which are related to an increased feeling of belonging (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003). Social identity theory is widely used in psychology to outline how and why individuals belong to specific groups (Orth & Rose, 2016). In relation to corporations, the term "organizational identification" is used, which occurs when individuals share same opinions and values with a corporation, and as a result, they feel strongly associated with it (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003). Organizations

usually aim to increase the brand appeal to its audience in order to construct an identity through which consumers can be associated with and respond positively to their marketing efforts (Press & Arnould, 2011). For business-to-consumer companies, identification is more beneficial compared to business-to-business, as it can contribute directly to their relation with consumers, by increasing their sales (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003).

Communication is a key factor that affects the level of consumers' identification with a brand. Corporations often use different ways of communication to enhance their identity, which includes annual reports, press releases or online communication platforms such as social media (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). However, brands have to be very rational and consistent when communicating their identity through corporate communication to avoid consumers' criticism (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003). When consumers are identified with a brand, they are more satisfied and loyal to its products (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003). Nevertheless, consumers' identification is not only related with the products of a brand, but also to the company itself (Martinez & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013). In line with the above statement, CSR is considered as a crucial factor to the increase of consumers' identification, as they tend to rate companies' values according to its CSR practices (Deng & Hu, 2017). Hence, with the rise of consumer consciousness regarding ecological and social issues, the participation of corporations to CSR activities could be very beneficial in CCI, as it can increase their connection with the company.

Effective CSR communication is fundamental for stakeholders' perception as it can improve their level of identification with a brand (Fatma et al., 2020). Furthermore, organizational transparency has a positive relation with CCI (Kim, 2017). Many researches had identified the mediating effect of CCI to the relationship of CSR and different consumers' behaviors (Deng & Xu, 2015; Ma et al., 2021; Martinez & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013). Specifically, according to recent studies, CCI could positively influence the relationship of CSR communication on online platforms and eWOM intentions (Fatma et al., 2020; Ma et al., 2021). Deng and Xu (2015) identified the mediating effect of CCI in the relationship of CSR initiatives and consumers' responses such as WOM and purchasing intention. In contrast, negative consumers' outcomes can be enhanced when consumers feel identified with a brand, as their expectations are higher. Thus, identified consumers are more willing to boycott a company when it faces a failure in relation to environmental issues and spread negative eWOM (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003). With the above arguments it can be assumed that CCI could mediate the relation of CSR transparency with the proposed consumer responses, which lead to the following hypotheses:

H5a: The relationship between CSR transparency and positive eWOM intentions will be mediated by consumers' company identification.

H5b: The relationship between CSR transparency and negative eWOM intentions will be mediated by consumers' company identification.

H5c: The relationship between CSR transparency and purchasing intention will be mediated by consumers' company identification.

2.7 Conceptual models

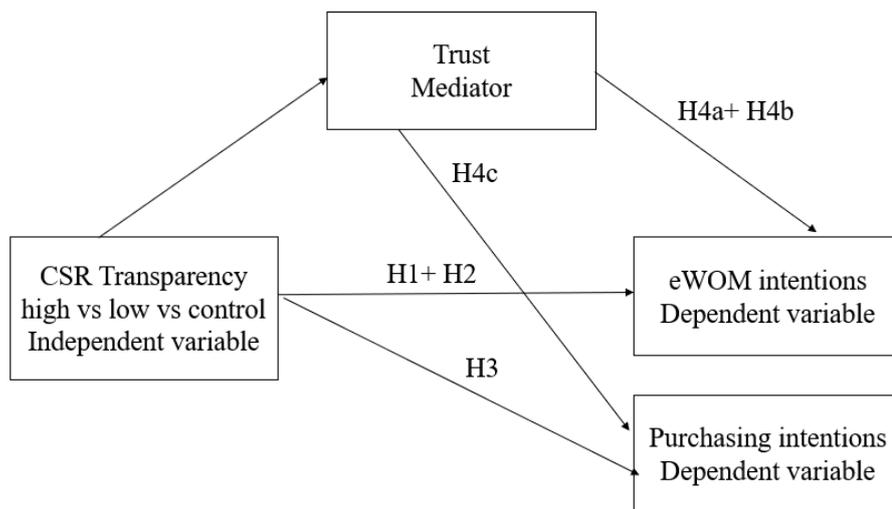


Figure 2.7.1. Conceptual model involving the hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H4a, H4b, H4c

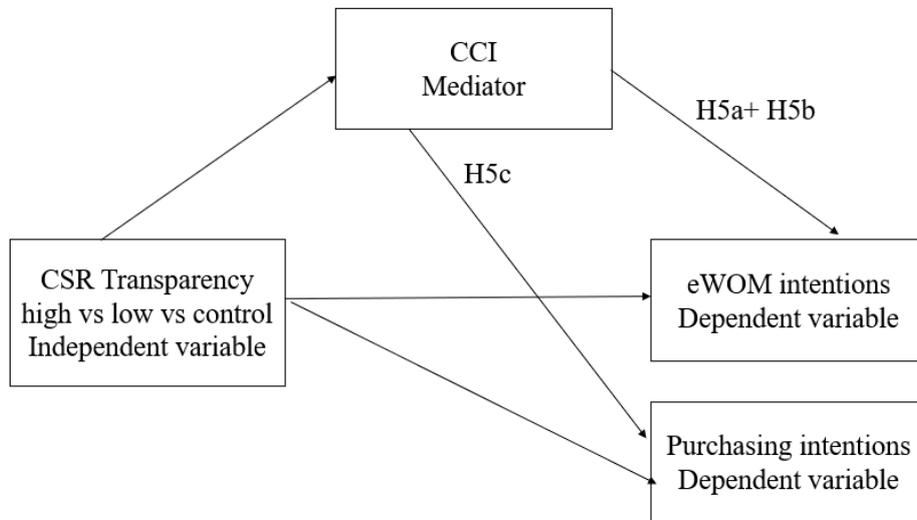


Figure 2.7.2. Conceptual model involving the hypotheses H5a, H5b, H5c

3. Method

This chapter explains first the research method that was conducted to answer the research question and examine the hypotheses that are presented in the previous chapter. Then, the sampling is explained, including the sample, the questionnaire procedure and the experimental materials. Following, the measurements used for the research and the operationalization are described. Lastly, the validity and reliability of the research are discussed.

3.1 Choice of research method

For this research a quantitative method is used to test the relationship between the researched variables and analyze the collected data. Specifically, this method allowed us to determine if the independent variable (CSR transparency) has a significant effect on the dependent variables (eWOM and purchasing intentions), as well as to examine the role of the mediators (trust and consumer-company-identification). Moreover, the data were collected using an online experiment.

Quantitative method was considered appropriate for this study as it allows researchers to explain scientific phenomena in social research using numerical data (Muijs, 2011). Furthermore, this method is effective when researchers aim to examine attitudes and behaviors and the relationships among variables using statistics (Goertzen, 2017). For the present research, an experiment was conducted in order to identify the causal relation between CSR transparency (independent variable) with consumer's eWOM and purchasing intentions (dependent variables). This study also contains consumers' company identification and trust as mediators. Experimental research is suitable for this study as, compared to other quantitative techniques, it tests causal relationships among variables in a more effective way (Neuman, 2014). For this study, several hypotheses have been formulated, based on theories and existing empirical research. Experimental designs offer the possibility to the researchers to test variables under different experimental conditions in order to examine specific hypotheses (Muijs, 2011).

To answer the research question and test the hypotheses, a uni-factorial experiment was conducted with three conditions for the independent variable naming as "CSR transparency". Specifically, the three conditions that were used to test the hypotheses in relation to the dependent variables (eWOM and purchasing intentions) are high CSR transparency, low CSR transparency and a control group. Regarding the type of the experiment, a between-subject

experimental design was used, as the participants were exposed in one of the three levels of the independent variable (Levin, 1999). To test the hypotheses an online experiment was designed. Participants were assigned randomly in one of the three experimental conditions in an automatic way through Qualtrics, to ensure that each group did not differ systematically (Neuman, 2014). Random assignment contributes to the between- subjects comparisons and is unbiased, which is significant when aiming to test specific hypotheses (Neuman, 2014). Compared to in- person, online experiments are cheaper and faster, and they allow researchers to include participants from different geographical areas; hence this method was considered as appropriate for this research in order to reach more participants in a short period of time. In addition, with online experiments the researcher does not have direct interaction with the participants, increasing in this way the response rates, as many people may feel more comfortable to answer questions in an objective way on their own place and speed, without the pressure of a laboratory environment (Barchard & Williams, 2008).

A drawback of online experiments is that some privacy concerns can occur from the side of the participants (Barchard & Williams, 2008). To overcome the aforementioned challenge, participants were informed at the beginning of the questionnaire that the research is anonymous and confidential and the data are going to be used only for academic purposes. Moreover, a consent form was included in this section, where participants were asked to click the consent button to participate in the research, following the information provided regarding the purposes of the study and anonymity. Another disadvantage of online experiments is that they generally have a higher dropout rate compared to offline experiments (Dandurand et al., 2008). To prevent this, simple and accessible questions were formulated in order to be easy to follow for participants. Additionally, the experiment was quite short, as the average duration to complete was five minutes, keeping in this way participants concentrated. Lastly, in order to be more accessible for the participants, the experiment was stimulated to operate on both desktop and mobile devices.

3.2 Sampling

For the purposes of this research, non-probability convenient sampling method was used, as it is a more time effective technique, and specifically the method of snowball sampling (Sarstedt et al., 2017). With this method, the researcher directly gets in touch with individuals to collect the data, by asking them to assist in the further distribution of the survey (Bryman, 2016). For this research, the personal network of the researcher was used for the recruitment

of the participants, by sharing the survey in the social media platforms Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn. In detail, a post has been created in the Facebook and LinkedIn page of the researcher, asking connections to fill in the survey (See figure 3.2.1 and 3.2.2). Within this post, connections of the researcher were also asked to share the questionnaire to their network. In this way, the survey was distributed beyond the personal network of the researcher, contributing to the increase of the responses in a short time. Apart from the post, a story was published in the Instagram account of the researcher to increase the number of the participants. Private messages were also sent to the personal circle of the researcher, with multiple reminders.

Hello,
I am currently working on my master thesis and I need respondents for my study. The research is related to the sustainability of fashion industries and their communication tactics. It would be really helpful if you could spend around 5 minutes completing the survey below:
<https://erasmusuniversity.eu.qualtrics.com/.../SV...>

The study is anonymous and confidential and there is no need to have prior knowledge of the topic. Feel free to share it also with your friends/family! Thank you in advance for your time!! 😊

ERASMUSUNIVERSITY.EU.QUALTRICS.COM

Qualtrics Survey | Qualtrics Experience Management



Figure 3.2.1. Post on researcher's Facebook page

Dear network,

I am currently working on my master's thesis and I need your help!!

I am researching the topic of sustainability in the fashion industry and its communication tactics. I am looking for respondents for my research!

I would really appreciate it if you can fill in the survey below and help me graduate! The survey is completely anonymous and confidential, and it takes you around 6 minutes to complete.

Also, feel free to share it with your network!

Link to the questionnaire: <https://lnkd.in/dcJg46BH>

Thank you very much in advance for your time!!

[#sustainability](#) [#research](#) [#communication](#) [#fashionindustry](#)
[#masterthesis](#)

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Figure 3.2.2. Post on researcher's LinkedIn page

A weakness of snowball sampling is that the sample can be biased, as the recruitment of the participants is implemented by a non-random process, decreasing in this way the appropriate representation of the sample (Bryman, 2016). To balance that, the survey was also distributed to a Facebook group called “Greeks in Rotterdam”, as well as to a WhatsApp group for employees of a Greek company called “Basehit”. Furthermore, by using social media platforms, the representation of the sample is increased, and thus the main threat of snowball sampling is avoided (Bryman, 2016).

The target population of the study were individuals over 18 years old, who speak English, as the whole experiment was conducted in the English language. As one of the researched variables is eWOM intentions, another criterion was participants to have a Facebook account, as this platform is considered as one of the most used for corporate communication (Reilly & Hynan, 2014). Before distributing the survey online, a pre-testing was held to ten people, to ensure that everything was clear to the participants and the manipulation check worked in the way that the researcher intended to. All of the participants in this phase did not mention any difficulty in understanding the sections of the experiment. However, following the pre-testing, few changes were made in the manipulation check question in order to be clearer to the participants. In addition, a sentence, explaining more the term of transparency, was added in the high and low transparency conditions. This has been done in order to ensure that the sample understands the meaning of the independent variable of this study, before answering the following questions. After that, the survey was distributed online to social media platforms, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn. Individuals who did not have access to the Internet were automatically excluded from the research. The online survey reached in total 339 respondents; however, many of them dropout very early which eventually leads to a sample of 229 recorded responses. The data were collected during the period of 28th of April until 9th of May. The final sample, after the data cleaning, included in total 184 respondents, as many participants who do not own a Facebook account were excluded, as well as few who did not answer significant questions.

3.2.3 Demographics

The survey included multiple demographics, which were used as control variables in this research. Specifically, gender, age, educational level and annual income were added as control variables. These characteristics could possibly influence consumers’ perceptions about sustainable industries and their behavior to environmentally sustainable products, and thus they can have an impact in the results of this research. Witek and Kuzniar (2021), found

that sociodemographic characteristics could impact individuals' attitudes and purchasing intentions of green products. Furthermore, according to Hu and Kim (2018), demographic characteristics such as gender, age and income can influence individuals' eWOM intentions.

Regarding gender, women are more eager to purchase eco- friendly products than men (Witek and Kuzniar, 2021). Furthermore, Yu (2020) found that women are less skeptical of the green marketing efforts of corporations than men. Thus, the percentage of male and female participants of this study could possibly influence the findings. Age has also been proved as a significant factor in the individuals' perception of green products and their purchasing intentions. Specifically, older generations tend to buy products more from organizations that they trust, and their intentions to buy green products, even overpriced, are higher compared to younger generations (Witek and Kuzniar, 2021). On the other hand, Kanchanapibul et al. (2014) identified that millennials are more concerned about environmental problems than older people. Hence, age was used also as a control variable.

In contrast, studies have identified the significant role of income in relation to sustainable products. People who have a better financial situation tend to buy more sustainable goods, regardless of the price, than individuals with low income (Witek and Kuzniar, 2021). Based on the aforementioned findings, income could be an influential factor in the results of the present research. Lastly, educated people are more worried about ecological issues, as they tend to put the needs of the environment above their personal needs (Witek and Kuzniar, 2021). Thus, the educational level of the participants should be also taken into account.

3.2.4 Sample

After the data cleaning, the final sample of the present research included 184 participants. Participants who indicated that they currently do not own a Facebook account were excluded, as well as those who did not answer all the questions. All participants included in the final sample were above 18 years old. Participants who did not answer this question were excluded from the final sample. The age range has been from 18 to 63 years old. The mean score for age was 31.16 and the standard deviation 9.10.

Regarding gender ($N=184$), 122 (66.3%) of the respondents identified themselves as females, while 58 (31.5%) were identified as males. In addition, four people (2.2%) of the sample preferred not to indicate their gender.

In addition, all respondents answered the question about their educational level ($N=184$). From the sample, a great number of participants owned a Master's degree (75,

40.8%), followed by a Bachelor's degree (71, 38.6%). Additionally, few people have completed an associate degree (18, 9.8%), while a lower number of people indicated that their highest education is high school (16, 8.7%). Last but not least, only two people of the sample have completed a doctoral degree (1.1%).

Considering the gross income, all of the participants responded to this question ($N=184$). Precisely, 112 people indicated that their annual income is less than 24.999 euros (60.9%). 21 respondents earn annually between 25.000 to 49.999 euros (11.4%), while 3 people between 50.000 to 74.999 euros (1.6%) and 4 people between 75.000 to 99.999 euros (2.2%) annually. Only one person earns more than 100.000 euros in a year. Among participants, 32 preferred not to share this information (17.4%), while 11 people (6%) indicated that they do not know the specific number of their yearly income.

In addition, all of the participants answered the questions about the Facebook account and frequency of use ($N=184$). In the final sample only participants who indicated that they have a Facebook account were included. As for the frequency of Facebook usage, 55 people indicated that they use Facebook “very often” (29.9%), while 45 “often” (24.5%). Furthermore, 43 of the participants use Facebook “sometimes” (23.4%), while 37 of people use it “rarely” (20.1%), and only 4 people “never” (2.2%). The mean score for participants in the frequency of Facebook usage was 2.40 and the standard deviation 1.17.

Participants were randomly assigned to the experimental conditions. Specifically, 59 people (32.1%) were allocated in the high transparency condition, 63 (34.2%) in the low transparency condition, while 62 (33.7%) in the control condition. Lastly, most of the responses were collected from Greece and Netherlands, as the first one is the country of birth of the researcher, while the second one the country of residence.

3.2.5 Questionnaire procedure

At the beginning of the survey respondents were introduced to the aim of the study and were informed that the duration of the questionnaire was about five minutes. Furthermore, respondents were notified about the anonymity and voluntary character of their participation, and that the data were collected only for the academic purposes of this study. Following the aforementioned information, participants had to give their consent to participate in the study, confirming at the same time that they are aware of the aforementioned information provided regarding the research. The email of the researcher was also provided for further questions about the study or clarifications about the survey. However, no one reached the researcher by email during the data collection period.

After the informed consent, participants were exposed randomly through Qualtrics, to one of the three experimental conditions, which are explained further in the next section of the current chapter (3.2.6 Stimulus material). Following, a manipulation check was conducted. Specifically, participants were asked to indicate if the presented fashion brand is highly transparent. After the manipulation check, some questions regarding the morality and competence of the fashion brand were included, which are both indicators of the trust that participants have in the presented company. Afterwards, participants had to answer questions in relation to their level of identification in relation to the fashion brand that they saw, in order to identify the mediating role of the variable consumer-company-identification. Then, two scales about positive and negative eWOM were presented, through which the sample had to answer questions in relation to the stimulus material that they saw before. Following the eWOM intentions scales, participants were asked questions about their intentions to purchase products from this brand. Lastly, the demographic part was contained, including questions about gender, age, educational level and income. Lastly, a debriefing message were included, informing participants that the company used was fictitious and that the post was inspired by H&M's sustainable practices. A link to the Fashion Transparency Index 2021 was also provided, in case participants want to find more information about it. In addition, the email of the research was included for further questions and respondents were thanked for their participation.

3.2.6 Experimental materials

This study contained in total three experimental conditions (high transparency, low transparency, control), where participants were exposed to different experimental material. Firstly, they received a text with information about a fictitious fashion brand called "Naranjas Fashion". This section included information in the high and low transparency condition about Fashion Transparency Index report 2021, which was slightly different in each of the two experimental conditions. This report is conducted annually by the global movement "Fashion revolution", which ranks fashion industries according to their level of transparency in the information provided regarding their sustainable and social efforts. Participants were also informed that they have to carefully read the text in this section, as well as that they were going to see a Facebook post of the aforementioned fashion company afterwards. The Facebook post contained different text in each experimental condition.

To be more precise, respondents assigned in the high transparency condition, were first asked to carefully read a text, through which they were informed about what is the Fashion

Transparency Index report. It was also explained that transparency in the fashion sector means the disclosure of information about the supply chain processes, business operations and its consequences to society and environment. Then, they were informed that they were going to see a Facebook post of the fashion brand “Naranjas Fashion”, which they had to read carefully. Furthermore, in this condition a sentence was included, which indicated that according to the Fashion Transparency Index 2021, the company “Naranjas Fashion” is a high transparent fashion brand. On the contrary, in the low transparency condition, the same information about the Fashion Transparency Index report and transparency were provided. However, in this condition the sentence about the level of transparency of the “Naranjas Fashion” brand indicated that it is a low transparent fashion company. Lastly, in the control condition, participants received in this section information only about the post that they were going to see afterwards about the “Naranjas Fashion” brand, with no additional information about the Fashion Transparency Index report and transparency.

Following the above manipulation, all respondents were exposed to a Facebook post of the fashion company “Naranjas Fashion”, which they had to carefully read and contained information about the launch of a new collection of the aforementioned brand. Nevertheless, the text in the Facebook post was different in each experimental condition. Specifically, in both high and low transparency conditions participants were informed about a new sustainable collection from “Naranjas Fashion” brand, but they received different information about sustainability in each of the conditions mentioned before. The high transparency condition, included precise information about the way the clothes were produced, by transforming recycled plastic bottles into fabric. In addition, this condition included details about the sustainable efforts of the company “Naranjas Fashion” during the last years, containing precise data about their sustainable tactics and percentages of how much organic and recycled materials they had used, as well as the proportion of their reduction in packaging. In this condition, the campaign was inspired by H&Ms sustainable kids collection called “bottles2fashion” (Bottle2fashion, n.d.), and the information provided about the brand’s sustainability efforts was retrieved from H&Ms Sustainability Report 2021 (2022); however, the percentages about its sustainable efforts were altered. The fashion company H&M was selected as it is considered a high transparent fashion brand, according to the Fashion Transparency Index 2021 (2021). In the low transparency condition, participants were only informed about the launch of their new sustainable collection, without any additional information about the production process of the collection, nor about their sustainable efforts. The text in this condition contained only general claims about

sustainability. In the control condition, the text in the Facebook post did not contain any information about sustainability.

The experiment used a fictitious fashion industry which was created only for research purposes. The use of a fictitious fashion company is considered appropriate as in this way participants would not have a pre-existing knowledge about the firm's CSR practices or previous experience of its products, and in this way, biases could be reduced. Furthermore, the name of the company was decided following in-depth research on the internet, in order to ensure that there is no other fashion brand with the same business name. The logo was also made by the researcher using the online tool "Canvas". The Facebook post was created using the website "Zeob", an online tool that generates social media posts which seem real. In addition, participants were informed for the exact purpose of the research, but only a general idea of the topic was provided. Lastly, they were not aware that there were several versions of the questionnaire and different experimental groups. They were informed about the above elements in the debriefing section at the end of the survey.

3.3 Measurements and operationalization

For the purposes of this study, different pre-existed scales were used. Furthermore, the data were analyzed in the terms of reliability and validity. A manipulation check was also included to confirm that manipulation worked. Factor and reliability analyses were also conducted to all scales and are presented in this section.

3.3.1 Manipulation check

To explore how the different experimental groups react in the manipulation, a manipulation check was conducted, which is considered as continuous variable. To be precise, one question was included after the manipulation with the text and Facebook post. In this question, participants had to specify on a Likert scale from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree) whether the statement "Naranjas fashion is a high transparent fashion brand regarding sustainability" appealed to them. All respondents answer this question ($N=184$), with a mean score at 4.23 and a standard deviation at 1.77.

3.3.2 Trust

The mediator *trust* was measured using six items, which were adapted from Leach, Ellemers, and Barreto (2007). Half of the items of the scale were related to morality and the other half

to competence, which both of them measure trust. For morality, participants had to specify on a Likert scale from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree), their perception about the fashion brand's honesty, sincerity and trustworthiness. For competence, respondents had also to indicate on a Likert scale from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree), their perception about the fashion brand's competence, intelligence and skillfulness. A factor analysis was conducted in this scale on SPSS, including all six items for morality and competence. The factor analysis using Principal Components extraction with Varimax rotation based on Eigenvalues (> 1.00), $KMO = .87$, $\chi^2 (N = 184, 15) = 998.02$, $p < .001$, showed that the six items load upon one factor, despite the two different indicators (morality and competence) of the scale *trust*. Thus, all the items were included in the variable *trust*. The resultant model explained 76.2% of the variance for the mediator *trust*. The scale can be considered as reliable, as its Cronbach's alpha was .93. A new variable naming as *trust* was created, with the computing items for further analysis. The mean score of the respondents was 4.31 and the standard deviation was 1.22.

3.3.3 Consumer-company-identification (CCI)

The variable *consumer-company-identification* is another mediator of this study and it was measured with five items, which were adapted from Deng and Xu (2015). Participants had to indicate on a Likert scale from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree), to what extent they agree with the following statements: "The values of Naranjas Fashion are similar to my values", "I am very interested on what others think about Naranjas Fashion brand", "I am interested on the related information and development of the brand Naranjas Fashion", "When someone praises Naranjas Fashion brand, it feels like a personal compliment", "When someone criticized Naranjas Fashion, it feels like a personal insult". A factor analysis was conducted in this scale on SPSS, including all the aforementioned five items. The factor analysis using Principal Components extraction with Varimax rotation based on Eigenvalues (> 1.00), $KMO = .73$, $\chi^2 (N = 184, 10) = 410.55$, $p < .001$, showed that the five items load upon one factor, thus, all the items were included to the variable *consumer-company-identification (CCI)*. The resultant model explained 60.5% of the variance for this mediator. The scale can be considered as reliable, as its Cronbach's alpha was .83. A new variable naming as *CCI* was created, with the computing items. The mean score of the respondents in this scale was 3.85 and the standard deviation was 1.23.

3.3.4 eWOM intentions

EWOM intentions, as dependent variables, were measured using ten items, which were adapted from Eisingerich, Chun, Liu and Jia (2015). The scale consisted of six items measuring *positive eWOM intentions*, while four items measuring *negative eWOM intentions*. A factor analysis was conducted for this scale on SPSS, including all ten items for eWOM intentions. The factor analysis using Principal Components extraction with Varimax rotation based on Eigenvalues (> 1.00), $KMO = .87$, $\chi^2 (N = 184, 45) = 1601.06$, $p < .001$, illustrated that the ten items belong to two factors naming as *positive eWOM* and *negative eWOM*. The resultant model explained 44.9% of the variance for positive eWOM, and 34.7% of the variance for negative eWOM.

According to the factor analysis, the positive eWOM factor contained six items (see table 3.3.4.1). The items in this factor include statements on whether participants are willing to “like” the post that they saw, post a positive comment or share the post, spread positive things about the company on Facebook, and start following the Facebook page of the company. Respondents had to specify on a Likert scale from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree) the level of their agreement in the aforementioned statements. Following the reliability analysis, the scale can be considered as reliable, as its Cronbach’s alpha was .93. A new variable naming as *positive eWOM* was created, with the computing items. The mean score of the respondents was 3.75 and the standard deviation was 1.51.

Furthermore, based on the factor analysis, the other factor found was negative eWOM and it contained four items (see table 3.3.4.1). This factor includes whether participants would post a negative comment under this Facebook post, share it on Facebook in order to express negative feelings about the company, say negative things about the company on Facebook and say negative things about the products of the company. The participants had to specify on a Likert scale from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree) the level of agreement of the aforementioned statements. The scale can be considered as reliable, as its Cronbach’s alpha was .94. A new variable naming as *negative eWOM* was created, with the computing items. The mean score of the respondents was 2.11 and the standard deviation was 1.18.

From the factor and reliability analysis, it is obvious that the two factors found can be tested separately, as they have a different connotation. From the literature, CSR transparency is usually related to positive consumers’ behaviors, while the lack of transparency with negative consumers’ outcomes. Taking into account the aforementioned statements, the two

factors can be examined as different variables, as they can lead to different findings when analyzing them.

Table 3.3.4.1: Factor and reliability analysis for eWOM scales

Item	Positive eWOM	Negative eWOM
I would 'like' this post on Facebook.	.89	
I would share this post with friends.	.88	
I would start to follow the Facebook page of the company.	.86	
I would recommend the products of this company to friends.	.85	
I would say positive things about the company on Facebook.	.84	
I would post a positive comment under this post.	.83	
I would be willing to say negative things about the company on Facebook.		.94
I would share this post on Facebook with my friends to express negative feelings about the company.		.92
I would say negative things about the fashion products of the company.		.92
I would post a negative comment under this post.		.91

R ² (variance explained)	44.9	34.7
Cronbach's alpha	.93	.94

3.3.5 Purchasing intentions

Purchasing intentions, as a dependent variable, was measured with four items, which were adapted from Lee, Phua, and Wu (2020). Participants of the research had to indicate on a Likert scale from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree) the extent that each statement applied to them. The items include whether participants are willing to try the “Naranjas Fashion” brand, buy other products of this brand, buy products of the brand if they happen to see it in the store and if they will actively seek out this brand in the store to purchase it. A factor analysis was conducted for this scale on SPSS, including all four items. To be precise, a factor analysis using Principal Components extraction with Varimax rotation based on Eigenvalues (> 1.00), $KMO = .84$, $\chi^2 (N = 184, 6) = 551.19$, $p < .001$, showed that the four items load into one factor. Thus, all the items were included in the variable *purchasing intentions*. The resultant model explained 88.3% of the variance for purchasing intentions variable. The scale can be considered as reliable, as its Cronbach's alpha was .91. A new variable naming as *purchasing intentions* was created, with the computing items. The mean score of the respondents was 4.52 and the standard deviation was 1.28.

3.4 Relationship Analysis

In order to identify the influence of CSR transparency on the dependent variables, eWOM and purchasing intentions, as well as the effect of the mediators, different analyses were performed. To begin with, to examine the differences of the groups of CSR transparency conditions to positive and negative eWOM intentions a one-way ANOVA analysis was used, as well as for the dependent variable purchasing intentions. Furthermore, to test if the randomization worked, the control variables were analyzed through ANOVA and Chi-Squared tests. Specifically, for the control variable age a one-way ANOVA was conducted with the CSR transparency conditions. As for the control variables gender, educational level and income, Chi-Squared tests was conducted. On the other hand, to test the mediation effects of trust and CCI, mediation analyses were performed by using simple or multiple regression analysis for the relationship of each of the dependent variables with CSR transparency and the mediator.

3.5 Validity and reliability

Several steps were implemented to ensure the validity and the reliability of the research. The validity of a research is mostly related to the scales used in the terms that they “measure what they are supposed to measure” (Pallant, 2016, p. 6). Participants in this research were randomly assigned in the experimental conditions, a fact that contributed to the internal validity of the experiment, as selection bias between groups could be avoided (Neuman, 2014). To ensure it, a randomization test was conducted, to test whether there were significant differences between them. To increase internal validity a manipulation check was also implemented in order to ensure that the conditions of the experiment were functioning in the way that the researcher expected (Neuman, 2014). With the manipulation check, it can be checked if the impact of the independent variables on the dependent variables are caused due to the manipulation. Furthermore, the fact that the experiment was pre-tested to few people before the data collection could contribute to the validity of the research. One threat to the internal validity of the present research was the maturation effect, which is related to external factors that can influence the dependent variable, other than the manipulation, such as boredom and tiredness of the participants during the experiment (Neuman, 2014). To overcome this threat, the questions of the experiment were quite short and simple, in order to keep participants concentrated on the questionnaire. Moreover, participants who did not answer all the questions, were not included to the final sample, which can contribute to the validity of the study.

As for the external validity, the fact that the research contained a large random sample from the social media network of the researcher and their personal network could improve the generalization of the population (Neuman, 2014). Reliability of a scale refers to the extent of which a scale is “free of random errors” (Pallant, 2016, p. 6). Reliability can be tested in terms of internal consistency of a scale, which refers to the level that all items of a scale are measuring the same variable (Pallant, 2016, p. 6). For this study, all the scales used were retrieved from previous research, which means that they are pre-tested and reliable, having a high Cronbach’s Alpha. From the reliability analyses that were presented in the previous sections, all the scales’ Cronbach’s Alpha were more than .80, which means that they are reliable (Pallant, 2016).

4. Results

In this chapter the results of this study are presented, following the analyses in SPSS from the data obtained through Qualtrics. Firstly, the manipulation check is analyzed through ANOVA in SPSS to identify if the manipulation worked in the way the researcher intended to.

Secondly, all the control variables have been tested through ANOVA and Chi-Squared tests in order to check if there are any differences between respondents that were randomly allocated to the three conditions. Then, different analyses were conducted to test the hypotheses of the present research. The analyses included a one-way ANOVA, simple and multiple linear regression analyses, as parts of the mediation analyses.

4.1 Manipulation check

To identify if the manipulation worked, ANOVA analysis was conducted for the manipulation check and the three experimental conditions (high CSR transparency, low CSR transparency, control). ANOVA illustrated a significant main effect of the three conditions on perceiving the fashion brand “Naranjas Fashion” as highly transparent regarding sustainability, $F(2, 181) = 15.87, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .15$. Tukey post-hoc comparisons showed that participants that were in the high CSR transparency condition group significantly agreed more that the fashion brand “Naranjas Fashion” is a high transparent brand ($M = 5.22, SD = 1.24$), than participants who were put in the low CSR transparency condition ($M = 3.84, SD = 1.85$), $p < .001$, and those in the control condition ($M = 3.68, SD = 1.76$), $p < .001$. There was no significant difference between the low CSR transparency condition and the control condition.

4.2 Control variables

To ensure that randomization through Qualtrics worked, and identify if there were significant differences between the groups assigned in the three experimental conditions, the demographics of the sample were analyzed. Specifically, age, gender, educational level and income were included as control variables in this research and were analyzed in order to decide if they are going to be taken into account in the hypothesis testing. A one-way ANOVA was conducted for age, as a continuous variable, while Chi-Squared tests for gender, educational level and level of income, as categorical variables. In case of non-significant differences between the experimental groups, the aforementioned control variables are not going to be included in the hypothesis testing. Nevertheless, in case of significant

differences among the groups, the relevant control variables are going to be included in analyses of the hypothesis testing.

4.2.1 Age

As age is a continuous variable, a one-way ANOVA was conducted, to identify if there is a significant difference in age among the manipulation groups. The results of the one-way ANOVA with age as dependent variable, and conditions as independent variable, showed that there is no significant difference in age among the experimental groups, $F(2, 181) = 0.96, p = .383$.

4.2.2 Gender

As gender is a categorical variable, a Chi-Squared test was conducted to identify if there is any significant difference in gender among the different groups. Four people who answered that they preferred not to indicate their gender were excluded from this analysis, by transforming them on SPSS as missing values, as this group was too small to make any assumption. The Chi-Squared test revealed that there was no significant difference in gender between the three experimental groups $\chi^2 (N = 180, 2) = 2.51, p = .284$.

4.2.3 Educational Level

Educational level, as a categorical variable, was also examined through a Chi-Squared test on SPSS. The Chi-Squared test revealed that there was no significant difference in the level of education between the different groups $\chi^2 (N = 184, 12) = 12.67, p = .393$.

4.2.4 Annual Income

To identify if there was any difference in the level of income and the different experimental groups, a Chi-Squared test was also conducted, as income is also a categorical variable. The results of the Chi-Squared test showed no significant difference on the level of income among the three experimental groups $\chi^2 (N = 184, 12) = 12.41, p = .413$. Taking into account that no significant differences were found among the groups, no control variables need to be included to further analysis.

4.3 Hypothesis testing

4.3.1 CSR transparency and positive eWOM intentions.

To examine the first hypothesis (H1) and identify if participants' positive eWOM intentions will be higher in the high CSR transparency condition of the fashion industry compared to the low CSR transparency and control conditions, a one-way ANOVA was conducted. This analysis was implemented to examine the relationship between CSR transparency conditions and positive eWOM intentions. CSR transparency is the independent variable, while positive eWOM the dependent variable. The one-way ANOVA test showed that the model was significant, $F(2, 181) = 6.05, p < .003, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .063$. Precisely, Tukey post-hoc comparisons illustrated that respondents in the high CSR transparency condition ($M=4.25, SD=1.44$) were significantly more prompt to spread positive eWOM than those assigned in the low CSR transparency condition ($M=3.33, SD=1.48$), $p<.002$. Nevertheless, no significant difference was found between the control condition ($M=3.69, SD=1.48$) high CSR transparency, $p<.087$, and low CSR transparency condition, $p<.376$. As a result, taking into account the mean scores for the three conditions and the results of the aforementioned analysis, participants' positive eWOM intentions were higher in the high CSR transparency condition compared to the low CSR transparency. Hence, the first hypothesis (H1) of the present research is partially supported.

4.3.2 CSR transparency and negative eWOM intentions.

To examine the second hypothesis (H2) and identify if participants' negative eWOM intentions will be higher in the low CSR transparency condition of the fashion industry compared to the high CSR transparency and control conditions, a one-way ANOVA was also conducted. This analysis was implemented to examine the relationship between the independent variable, CSR transparency conditions with the dependent variable, negative eWOM intentions. ANOVA test revealed non-significant effect for the CSR transparency conditions and negative eWOM intentions, $F(2, 181) = .284, p < .753, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .003$. This means that the second hypothesis (H2) is rejected.

4.3.3 CSR transparency and purchasing intentions.

To examine the third hypothesis (H3) and identify if participants' purchasing intentions will be higher in the high CSR transparency condition of the fashion industry compared to the low CSR transparency and control conditions, a one-way ANOVA was also conducted. This

analysis was implemented to examine the relationship between the independent variable (CSR transparency conditions) with the dependent variable, purchasing intentions. The one-way ANOVA test showed no significant effect for the CSR transparency conditions and purchasing intentions, $F(2, 181) = 3.009, p < .052, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .032$. This means that the third hypothesis (H3) is also rejected.

4.3.4 Mediating effect of trust in the relationship between CSR transparency, eWOM and purchasing intentions.

To test the fourth hypotheses (H4a, H4b & H4c), different mediation analyses were performed, to identify the mediating effect of trust in the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variables. On hypothesis 4a, the mediating effect of trust in the relationship between CSR transparency and positive eWOM intentions was tested. On hypothesis 4b, the mediating effect of trust in the relationship between CSR transparency and negative eWOM intentions was examined. Lastly, on hypothesis 4c, the mediating effect of trust in the relationship between CSR transparency and purchasing intentions was tested. To identify the mediating effect of trust in the aforementioned relationships, mediation analysis was conducted thrice, which is also referred as multiple regression analysis. To conduct the analyses mentioned above, two dummy variables were created for the CSR transparency conditions in order to include this categorical variable into regression analysis. The first dummy variable (high CSR transparency dummy) divides the high CSR transparency condition (1) from the low CSR transparency and control conditions (0). The second dummy variable (low CSR transparency dummy) divides the low CSR transparency condition (1) from the high CSR transparency and control conditions (0). The control condition was the reference group. As stated in the previous chapter, for trust, a new computed variable was created, which was used in the mediation analyses.

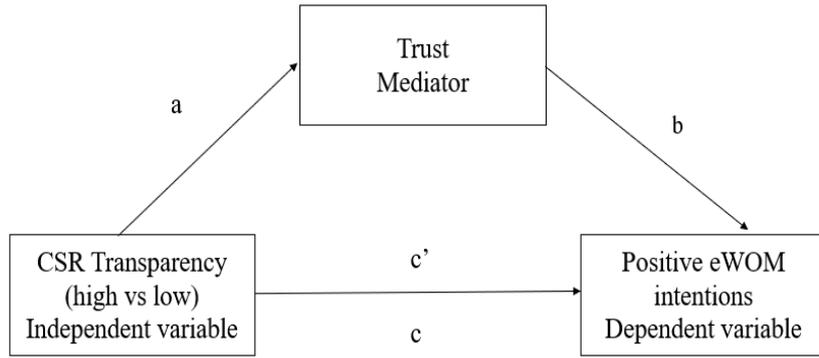


Figure 4.3.4.1 Relationships that are examined for positive eWOM intentions model

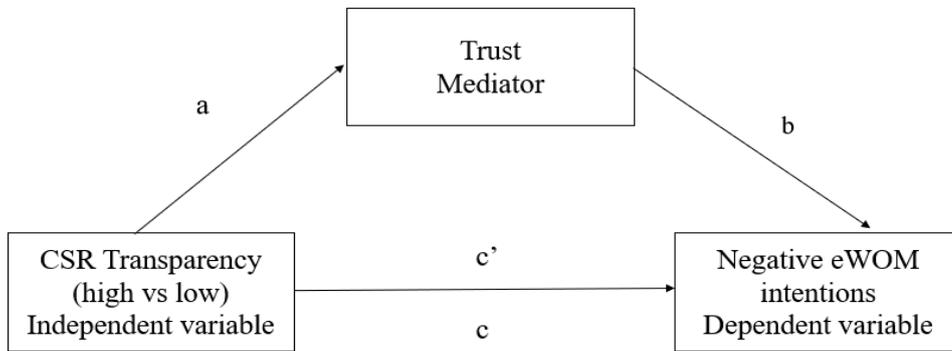


Figure 4.3.4.2 Relationships that are examined for negative eWOM intentions model

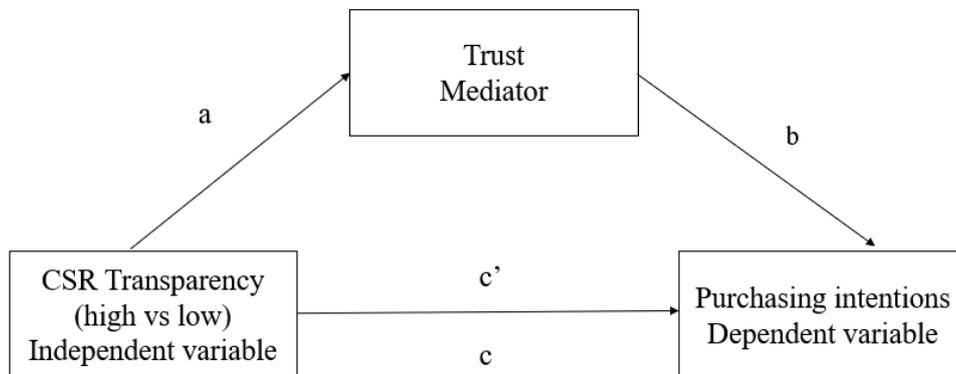


Figure 4.3.4.3 Relationships that are examined for purchasing intentions model

Positive eWOM intentions (H4a)

- The effect of CSR transparency on positive eWOM intentions (c)

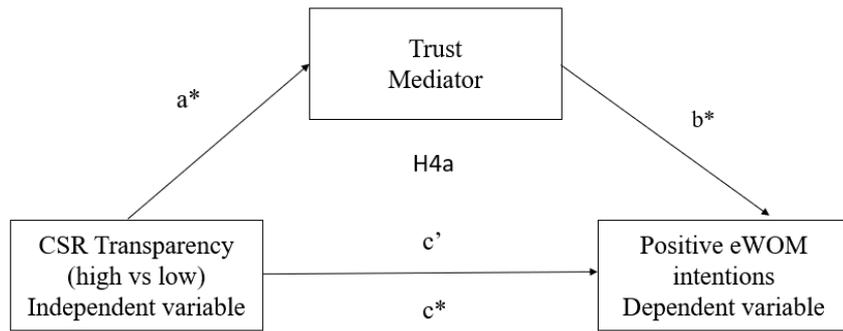
To examine the relationship between CSR transparency and positive eWOM intentions, a multiple linear regression analysis was performed, using the dummy variables as independent variables. Positive eWOM intentions was the dependent variable (continuous variable). The model found to be significant, $F(2,181) = 6.05, p < .003, R^2 = .06$. To be precise, the results revealed no significant relationship between low CSR transparency dummy on positive eWOM intentions ($\beta = -0.11, p = .182$). However, there was a significant influence of high CSR transparency dummy on positive eWOM intentions. Precisely, high CSR transparency had a positive significant effect on positive eWOM intentions ($\beta = 0.17, p = .035$).

-The effect of CSR transparency on trust (a)

To investigate the relationship between the independent variables, high CSR transparency dummy and low CSR transparency dummy, with the dependent continuous variable trust, multiple linear regression analysis was also conducted. The model was found to be significant, $F(2,181) = 12.34, p < .001, R^2 = .12$. High CSR transparency dummy had a significant positive effect on trust, ($\beta = 0.23, p < .004$). On the other hand, low CSR transparency dummy had a significant negative effect on trust ($\beta = -0.16, p < .041$).

-The effect of both CSR transparency and trust on positive eWOM intentions (b + c)

A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the effects of high CSR transparency dummy, low CSR transparency dummy and trust on positive eWOM intentions. In this analysis, high CSR transparency dummy, low CSR transparency dummy and trust were predictors, and positive eWOM intentions was the dependent variable. The model was found to be significant, $F(3,180) = 58.38, p < .001, R^2 = .49$. Specifically, there was a significant positive relationship of trust with positive eWOM intentions, ($\beta = 0.69, p < .001$). Furthermore, the effect of high CSR transparency dummy on positive eWOM intentions disappeared completely ($\beta = 0.01, p < .834$). No effect was also found for low CSR transparency dummy and positive eWOM intentions ($\beta = 0.00, p < .938$). This means that the variable trust fully mediates the relationship between CSR transparency and positive eWOM. Thus, according to the aforementioned results, hypothesis 4a is supported.



Note: * $p < .001$

Figure 4.3.4.4 Results for positive eWOM model with trust as a mediator

Negative eWOM intentions (H4b)

- The effect of CSR transparency on negative eWOM intentions (c)

To test the effect of CSR transparency on negative eWOM intentions, a multiple regression was also conducted, with the dummy variables of the independent variable as predictors and negative eWOM, a continuous variable, as dependent variable. According to the results, no significant relationship was found between CSR transparency and negative eWOM, $F(2,181)=0.28, p=.753, R^2=.03$. This means that hypothesis H4b is rejected, as it is not possible to have mediation between the variables. However, the relationships between CSR transparency and trust, as well as between trust and negative eWOM intentions are examined in order to identify if there is an indirect effect of CSR transparency on negative eWOM, through trust.

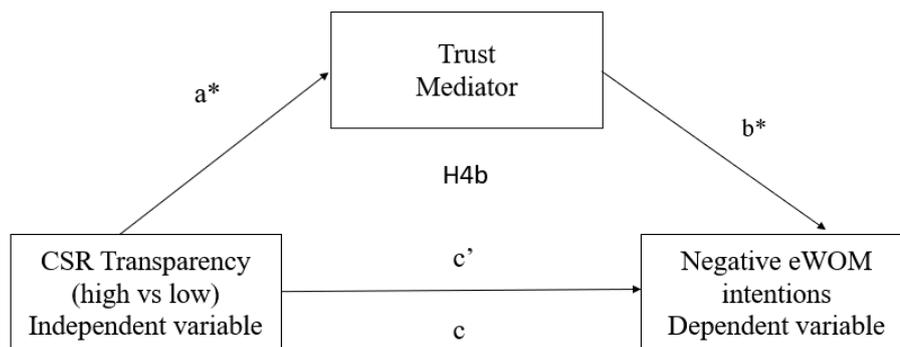
- The effect of CSR transparency on trust (a)

For the relationship of CSR transparency and trust the same analysis can be used as for the model of positive eWOM intentions, with $F(2,181)=12.34, p<.001, R^2=.12$. In this model, high CSR transparency dummy had a significant positive influence on trust ($\beta=0.23, p<.004$), while low CSR transparency dummy had a significant negative effect on trust ($\beta=-0.16, p<.041$).

-The effect of trust on negative eWOM intentions (b)

To test the influence of trust (independent variable) on negative eWOM (dependent variable), a simple linear regression analysis was conducted. Both of the aforementioned variables are continuous. The model found to be significant, $F(1,182)=10.78, p<.001, R^2=.05$. Trust had a significant negative effect on negative eWOM intentions ($\beta=-0.23, p<.001$).

For the model of negative eWOM intentions, no significant relationship was found between CSR transparency and negative eWOM intentions. Taking into account the above information, hypothesis H4b is rejected. However, there was a significant relationship between CSR transparency and trust. In addition, a significant relationship was found between trust and negative eWOM. Hence, despite the fact that there is no mediation, there is an indirect effect of CSR transparency on negative eWOM, through the trust that respondents have.



Note: * $p < .001$

Figure 4.3.4.5 Results for negative eWOM model with trust as a mediator

Purchasing intentions (H4c)

- The effect of CSR transparency on purchasing intentions (c)

A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between CSR transparency, a categorical variable and purchasing intentions, a continuous variable. The high CSR transparency dummy and the low CSR transparency dummy were the independent variables, while purchasing intentions the dependent variable. No significant relationship found in this model, $F(2,181)= 3.009, p<.052, R^2=.03$. This means that hypothesis H4c is also rejected, as it is not possible to have mediation between the variables.

However, the relationship between CSR transparency and trust, as well as between trust and purchasing intentions are examined in order to identify if there is an indirect effect of CSR transparency on purchasing intentions, through trust.

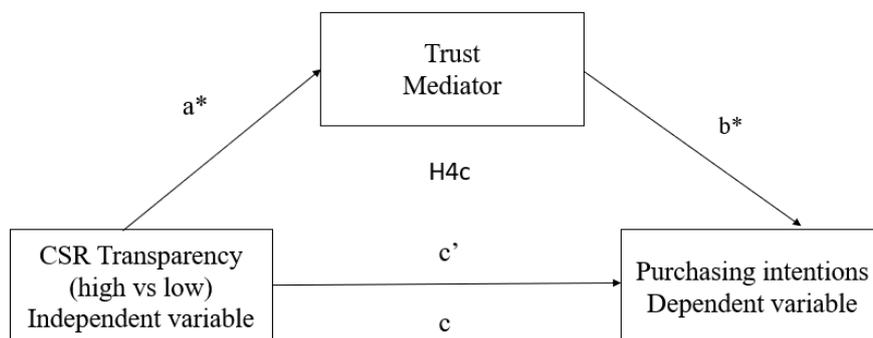
-The effect of CSR transparency on trust (a)

For the relationship of CSR transparency and trust the same analysis can be also used as for the model of positive eWOM intentions, with $F(2,181)=12.34$, $p<.001$, $R^2=.12$. High CSR transparency dummy had a significant positive influence on trust ($\beta=0.23$, $p<.004$), while low CSR transparency dummy had a significant negative effect on trust ($\beta=-0.16$, $p<.041$).

-The effect of trust on purchasing intentions (b)

To test the relationship between trust (independent variable) and purchasing intentions (dependent variable), a simple linear regression analysis was performed. Both of the above variables are continuous. The results of the analysis showed that the model was significant, $F(1,182)=230.21$, $p<.001$, $R^2=.55$. Trust had a significant positive effect on purchasing intentions ($\beta=0.74$, $p<.001$).

For the model of purchasing intentions, no significant relationship was found between CSR transparency and purchasing intentions. Taking into account the above information, hypothesis H4c is also rejected. However, a significant relationship was found between trust and purchasing intentions, as well as between CSR transparency and trust. Hence, despite the fact that there is no mediation, there is an indirect effect of CSR transparency on purchasing intentions, through the trust that respondents have.



Note: * $p < .001$

Figure 4.3.4.6 Results for purchasing intentions model with trust as a mediator

4.3.5 Mediating effect of consumer-company-identification (CCI) in the relationship between CSR transparency, eWOM and purchasing intentions.

For the mediator consumer-company-identification (CCI) several hypotheses were formulated. On hypothesis 5a, it was stated that the effect of CSR transparency on positive eWOM intentions is mediated by CCI. On hypothesis 5b, it was predicted that the effect of CSR transparency on negative eWOM intentions is mediated by CCI. Accordingly, on hypothesis 5c, it was stated that the effect of CSR transparency on purchasing intentions is mediated by CCI. For hypothesis 5a, a mediation analysis was conducted, which is referred also as multiple regression analysis, to identify the mediation effect of CCI in the relationship between the independent variable (CSR transparency) and the dependent variable (positive eWOM intentions). To conduct the analysis mentioned above, the two dummy variables (high CSR transparency dummy & low CSR transparency dummy) were used, as described in the previous section (see 4.3.4), for the CSR transparency conditions, in order to include this categorical variable into the regression analysis.

As for the hypothesis 5b and 5c, no mediation analysis was conducted. Specifically, in the previous sections, the relationship between CSR transparency on eWOM intentions (see 4.3.5 & 4.3.6) and purchasing intentions (see 4.3.7) were tested through multiple regression analyses. Taking into account that no significant effects were found of CSR transparency on negative eWOM intentions and purchasing intentions, no mediation analysis is going to be conducted for the mediator consumer- company-identification and these two variables, as hypothesis 5b and 5c are automatically rejected. However, the indirect effects of CSR transparency on negative eWOM and purchasing intentions, through CCI are going to be tested.

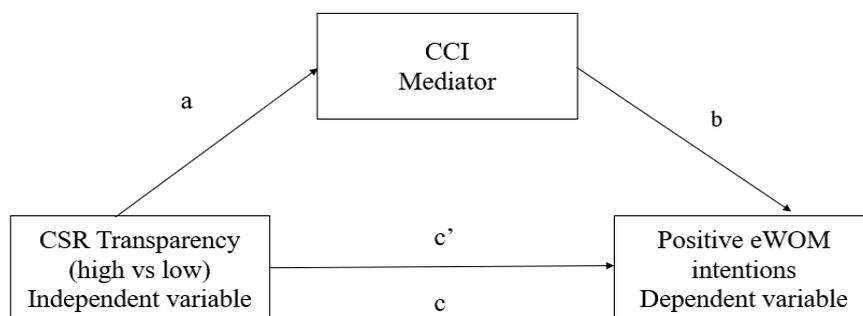


Figure 4.3.5.1 Relationships that are examined for positive eWOM intentions model

Positive eWOM intentions (H5a)

- The effect of CSR transparency on positive eWOM intentions (c)

To test the influence of CSR transparency on positive eWOM the same analysis can be used as for the model of positive eWOM intentions in the section 4.3.5, with $F(2,181) = 6.05$, $p < .003$, $R^2 = .06$. In this model, high CSR transparency dummy had a significant positive influence on positive eWOM intentions ($\beta = 0.17$, $p = .035$), while low CSR transparency dummy had no significant effect on positive eWOM intentions ($\beta = -0.11$, $p = .182$).

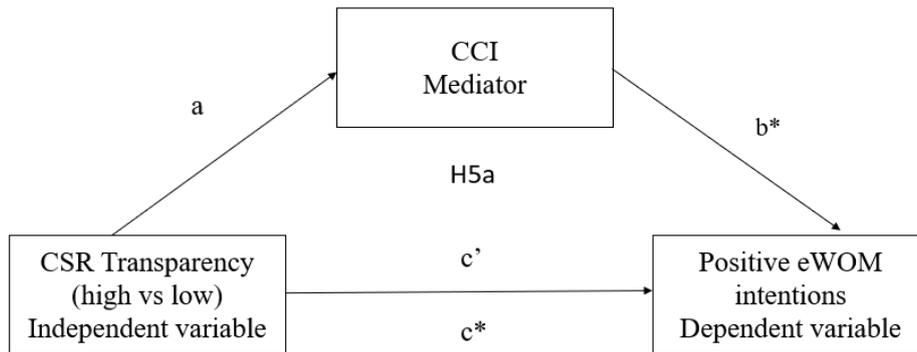
-The effect of CSR transparency on consumer-company-identification (a)

To investigate the effect of CSR transparency (high CSR transparency dummy, low CSR transparency dummy) on the dependent continuous variable consumer-company-identification (CCI), a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted. The model was not significant, $F(2,182) = 1.97$, $p < .142$, $R^2 = .02$. High CSR transparency dummy had no significant influence on CCI, ($\beta = 0.09$, $p < .274$), as well as low CSR transparency dummy ($\beta = -0.07$, $p < .372$). Taking into consideration that there is no effect of CSR transparency on the mediator CCI, no further analysis was executed due to the aforementioned insignificant model. Thus, hypothesis H5a is also rejected, as it is not possible to have mediation between the variables. Following, the influence of consumer-company-identification on positive eWOM intentions is examined.

-The effect of CCI on positive eWOM intentions (b)

To examine the effect of CCI (independent variable) on positive eWOM intentions (dependent variable), a simple linear regression analysis was conducted. Both of the aforementioned variables are continuous. The model found to be significant, $F(1,182) = 210.67$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .53$. CCI had a significant positive effect on positive eWOM intentions ($\beta = -0.73$, $p < .001$).

For the model of positive eWOM intentions, a significant relationship was found between CSR transparency and positive eWOM intentions, as well as CCI with positive eWOM intentions. In contrast, there was no significant relationship between CSR transparency and CCI. Taking into account the above information, hypothesis H5a is rejected. Furthermore, no indirect effect can be assumed, as there was no significant effect of the independent variable (CSR transparency) and the mediator (CCI).



Note: * $p < .001$

Figure 4.3.5.2 Results for positive eWOM model with CCI as a mediator

Negative eWOM intentions (H5b)

As stated before, the hypothesis 5b is rejected, as long as no significant influence was revealed between CSR transparency and negative eWOM intentions ($p < .753$), and thus no mediation can be observed for CCI. A simple linear regression was conducted to identify if there is a significant effect of CCI (predictor) on negative eWOM (dependent variable). The model was also found not significant, $F(1,182) = 2.73$, $p < .602$, $R^2 = .004$. Thus, CCI has no significant effect on negative eWOM intentions ($\beta = -0.03$, $p < .602$). Taking into account that there was also no significant relationship for CSR transparency and CCI ($p < .142$), no indirect effect of the mediator CCI can be found for negative eWOM intentions.

Purchasing intentions (H5c)

In line with the above section, the hypothesis 5c is also rejected, as long as no significant relationship was found between CSR transparency and purchasing intentions ($p < .052$), and thus no mediation can be observed for CCI. A simple linear regression was conducted to identify if there is a significant effect of CCI (predictor) on purchasing intentions (dependent variable). The model was found significant, $F(1,182) = 176.27$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .49$. CCI has a significant positive effect on purchasing intentions ($\beta = 0.70$, $p < .001$). However, taking into consideration that there was also no significant relationship for CSR transparency and CCI ($p < .142$), no indirect effect of the mediator CCI can be found for purchasing intentions.

5. Discussion

Stakeholders' demands regarding CSR activities of fashion industries are more imperative during the last decades, as a result of the high awareness of social and ecological issues. Specifically, the main concerns of consumers about the negative effects of fashion industries are related with the damage to the planet due to the supply chain processes (Haug & Busch, 2015). As a result, consumers tend to be more cautious with fashion brands. The way companies communicate their socially responsible practices is critical for the establishment of positive or negative consumers' attitudes toward a brand. Transparency strengthens the relationship among corporations and consumers, as in high levels, it can reduce consumers' skepticism toward a company (Kim & Lee, 2018). Trust could enhance the relationship of transparent communication and consumers' behaviors, as people are more willing to support and reward a brand that they perceive as reliable (Kang & Hustvedt, 2014). In addition, consumers' identification with a brand could mediate the relation of CSR transparency with positive or negative consumers' responses. An online experiment was conducted to identify the relationships of the aforementioned aspects and answer the following research question: To what extent does CSR transparency of fashion industries influence consumers' positive or negative eWOM and purchasing intentions?

In the following sections of this chapter, the findings of this study are discussed, which contribute to answering the research question. In addition, the theoretical and practical implications of this research are explained, as well as the limitations. In the last section, directions of future research are provided.

5.1 Key findings

The aim of this research was to identify how different levels of CSR transparency of fashion industries can influence consumers' eWOM and purchasing intentions, examining as well the mediating influence of trust and consumer-company-identification (CCI). In the first hypothesis (H1), it was predicted that high transparency in the CSR activities of a fashion industry will lead to higher positive eWOM intentions from consumers, compared to low CSR transparency. The findings showed significant differences between participants of the three experimental conditions, in their intention to participate in positive eWOM.

Specifically, participants exposed to high CSR transparency condition, were more willing to participate in positive eWOM about the fashion brand, compared to those in the low CSR transparency condition. This means that when a fashion brand is highly transparent of their

CSR practices, consumers are more prompt to evaluate the brand positively through eWOM. Brand's transparency on social media can reinforce a positive relationship between corporations and consumers (Men & Tsai, 2014). The findings of the first hypothesis are in line with previous research, which identified the importance of corporate transparency for positive consumer outcomes. Specifically, earlier studies confirmed that consumers tend to have positive attitudes and spread positive eWOM about a company when they perceive it as transparent and honest (Choi et al., 2018; Chu et al., 2020). Kang and Hustvedt (2014) had identified the influence of transparency on positive consumers' eWOM intentions, by examining CSR activities which are related to partnerships of corporations with NGOs (Kang & Hustvedt, 2014). However, this research expands the above findings, as it examined transparency in CSR communication in the fashion context, focusing on transparency in environmental sustainability.

In the second hypothesis (H2), it was expected that consumers' negative eWOM intentions will be higher when a fashion brand's CSR transparency is low, compared to high CSR transparency condition. Negative eWOM intentions could be reinforced when consumers perceive a brand as non-transparent and dishonest about its sustainable efforts. According to the findings, non-significant differences were found between the three conditions and negative eWOM intentions, thus this hypothesis was rejected. This means that a fashion brand's CSR transparency level does not influence negative eWOM intentions, as consumers are not willing to spread negative information through social media platforms when a fashion brand is not highly transparent. Previous research had showed that negative eWOM intentions can be reinforced when consumers are dissatisfied with the products of a company (Haque et al., 2020). Thus, it can be assumed that the way companies communicate their CSR efforts is not a strong factor for consumers to spread negative information, compared to other elements related with the products themselves. In addition, these findings can be explained taking into consideration the cultural background of the final sample of the present research, which consisted of mainly Greek participants. Culture could play a significant role in the willingness of people to engage in negative eWOM (Haque et al., 2020), and thus a study containing a more multicultural sample could have ended up with different results regarding negative eWOM.

In the third hypothesis (H3), it was predicted that consumers' purchasing intentions will be higher when the fashion brand is highly transparent for its CSR activities rather than when it is low transparent. According to the findings, this hypothesis was also not supported, as no significant differences were found between the three conditions and consumers'

purchasing intentions. The findings were contradicted from existing research which identified that consumers tend to purchase products from corporations that perceive them as transparent (Yang et al., 2021; Kang & Hustvedt, 2014; Shen et al., 2012). This contradiction can be explained through several reasons. To begin with, one possible explanation is the level of income of the participants of this research. Specifically, most of the participants (60.9% of the sample) indicated that their annual gross income is relatively low (below 24.999€). In general, individuals with low income might be more hesitant to purchase green products, as they are mainly perceived as more expensive, than non-green products. Furthermore, consumers' buying intentions of sustainable fashion products can be influenced by several other factors, which are related to individuals' characteristics. Such characteristics can be environmental concern and knowledge (Dhir et al., 2021), factors which were not measured in the present research and they can influence consumers intentions to purchase green products from a transparent organization.

In the fourth hypotheses of this research (H4a, H4b & H4c), the mediating effects of trust in the relationship between CSR transparency with eWOM and purchasing intentions, were examined. The findings for each of the fourth hypotheses were different. To be precise, in hypothesis 4a it was expected that trust will mediate the relationship between CSR transparency and positive eWOM intentions. First a significant positive relationship was found between CSR transparency and positive eWOM. This means that the higher CSR transparency of a fashion brand, leads to higher consumers' positive eWOM intentions. Following, the relationship of CSR transparency with trust was tested. The findings showed that when CSR transparency levels of a brand are high, consumers tend to trust it more. This is in line with previous research, which identified the positive influence of brand's transparency on trust building (Kim, 2017; Kong et al., 2021; Tomlinson & Schnackenberg, 2022). Lastly, to identify the mediating effects of trust, the relationships between trust and positive eWOM, as well as between CSR transparency and positive eWOM were tested. The findings showed that trust fully mediates the relationship between CSR transparency and positive eWOM. To be precise, when consumers have a high level of trust in the fashion brand, their intentions to spread positive eWOM for this company are higher. These findings are in line with previous research which identified that consumers are more willing to spread positive eWOM for a transparent corporation that they trust (Kang & Hustvedt, 2014). In addition, Fatma et al. (2020) identified that CSR initiatives of corporations have positive effects on consumers' trust and eWOM intentions.

In the hypothesis 4b, it was predicted that trust will mediate the relationship between CSR transparency and negative eWOM intentions. The findings showed no significant relationship between CSR transparency and negative eWOM intentions, thus no mediation effects can be found. The use of a fictitious industry on this research could explain the non-significant results of CSR transparency on negative eWOM, as consumers may be more willing to spread negative comments about an organization which is known for its irresponsible practices. Transparency in CSR communication could play a critical role to industries with previous bad reputation, by decreasing consumers' skepticism (Lee & Comello, 2019), but it may not have a strong influence on negative eWOM intentions for a non-established company. However, the results showed significant positive effects of CSR transparency on trust, findings that are in line with previous research (Kang & Hustvedt, 2014; Kim, 2019). Furthermore, a significant negative relationship between trust and negative eWOM intentions was found which is also in line with the literature (Nam et al., 2018). Hence, even though trust is not considered as a mediator in this relationship, CSR transparency has an indirect effect on consumers' negative eWOM intentions, through the level of trust that the respondents of this research have. Thus, the use of a real-company could have led to direct mediating effects of trust, as well as a bigger sample size, which is more prompt to lead to significant results (Bryman, 2016).

In hypothesis 4c, it was stated that trust will mediate the relationship of CSR transparency and purchasing intentions. The findings revealed no significant effects of CSR transparency and consumers' purchasing intentions. Thus, no mediating effects of trust in the aforementioned relationship can be found. These results are contradicted with earlier research which identified the mediating effects of trust between transparency and purchasing intentions (Kang & Hustvedt, 2014). Same as with negative eWOM intentions, the indirect effect of trust in the relationship of CSR transparency and purchasing intentions was tested. Previous research had shown both direct and indirect effects of the relationship between CSR activities on social media and consumers' purchasing intention (Cheng et al., 2021). The findings showed an indirect effect of trust in this relationship, as except for the positive relation between CSR transparency and trust, a positive relationship was found between trust and purchasing intentions. This means that consumers' higher level of trust in a company can led to higher buying intentions, a finding which is in line with previous research (Huo et al., 2022; Kang & Hustvedt, 2014). In line with negative eWOM intentions, it can be assumed that a bigger sample size could have contributed to a significant relationship among CSR

transparency and purchasing intentions (Bryman, 2016), and thus to the mediating role of trust for this hypothesis.

In the fifth hypotheses (H5a, H5b & H5c), the mediating effects of consumer-company identification (CCI) in the relationships between CSR transparency with positive eWOM, negative eWOM and purchasing intentions were stated. Firstly, the hypothesis 5a was tested to identify the mediating effect of CCI on the relationship between CSR transparency and positive eWOM. A significant positive relationship between CCI and positive eWOM was found, which is in line with the literature (Deng & Xu, 2015; Fatma et al., 2020); however, a non-significant relationship was found between CSR transparency and CCI. Thus, no mediation effects can be found of CCI in the relationship of CSR transparency with none of the aforementioned dependent variables, nor indirect effect; hence hypotheses, H5a, H5b and H5c were rejected. Previous researches had addressed contradicted findings of the present research, by identifying the mediating role of CCI in the relationship of CSR activities and different consumers' outcomes (Deng & Xu, 2015; Ma et al., 2021; Martinez & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013). This contradiction can be explained by the fact that an imaginary fashion industry was used in the experiment of the present research. To be precise consumer-company-identification levels could not be very high, as participants were not familiar with the presented fashion industry. Consumers' identification with a brand can more easily be found when consumers have already had an experience and interaction with the company, as in this way they develop a sense of belonging with it (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003).

5.2 Theoretical and practical implications

From a theoretical approach, the findings of the present study add fundamental knowledge on the existing literature, regarding the topics of CSR communication and consumers' attitudes, within the context of the fashion industry. To be precise, the current research investigated the relationship between the topic of transparency in CSR communication in relation to consumers' eWOM and purchasing intentions. Several researches had identified the positive effects of CSR on different consumers' behaviors (Chu et al., 2020; Fatma et al., 2020; Groza et al., 2011; Kim & Austin, 2020). Nevertheless, the role of transparency in CSR communication has been widely ignored by academics. This study connects transparency with CSR communication on social media, by combining it with consumers' eWOM and purchasing intentions. This combination is crucial, as the research in this direction is scarce. Transparency is widely related to consumers' behaviors (Kang & Hustvedt, 2014) and thus a

study examining its relation with eWOM and purchasing intentions, as well as with trust and CCI provide valuable knowledge to the literature of the aforementioned topics, as these aspects have not been researched before jointly. More importantly, it expands the academic topics of “online CSR communication” and “sustainable fashion”, by addressing the significant role of transparent communication of environmental activities in the fashion sector. Sustainability in the fashion context is a topic which have gained the interest of academics (Brewer, 2019; Haug & Busch, 2015; Joergens, 2006). Thus, within this research, additional knowledge is added in a high academic interest field. The most important findings of this research suggested that transparency in CSR communication of fashion industries affects consumers’ intention to engage in positive eWOM about the company and that the level of trust plays a crucial role in this relationship. Although trust has been examined by several academics in relation to consumers’ attitudes, this study provides interesting findings on its positive influence in relation to CSR and transparency subjects.

As for the practical implications, the present research provides essential knowledge for organizations and managers, by addressing factors that improve the relationship between brands and consumers. This relationship is very important, especially for B2C, like retailers, whose revenues rely on consumers. Specifically, managers and marketers of fashion industries can benefit from this study by recognizing the importance of transparency and its positive effects in the CSR context. Effective CSR communication is essential for fashion industries, as they have been accused multiple times for greenwashing practices (Sailer et al., 2022). Organizations should be very cautious when designing their CSR communication strategies, as it can affect consumers' perceptions and behaviors, such as positive eWOM intentions. Negative eWOM is stronger than positive eWOM in the assessment of a brand, as consumers’ opinions tend to be affected more from the negative comments and reviews (Nam et al., 2020). However, consumers are more willing to advocate positively for a company that is transparent (Kang & Hustvedt, 2014). Thus, corporations in the fashion sector have to adopt transparent communication practices in social media platforms regarding their sustainable practices, as in this way can increase consumers’ trust. Transparency can be achieved by disclosing precise information about their supply chains and manufacturing processes, as well as by defining concrete goals about their sustainable efforts. More important for fashion industries is to communicate to its stakeholders the impacts of their environmentally sustainable practices to its stakeholders.

5.3 Limitations

This study contributes to the existing academic literature, by examining the effects of CSR transparency on specific consumers' outcomes, using trust and CCI as mediators.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations, which have influenced the findings of the research.

To begin with, the first limitation is the use of a fictitious fashion brand. For the purposes of this research an imaginary fashion industry was used to measure actual experiences of consumers with a brand, with the intention to reduce the biases that consumers may have with existing fashion industries. These real experiences included their intentions to participate in positive or negative eWOM about the presented fashion brand, purchasing intentions, as well as trust and CCI levels. Some previous research suggests that for actual consumers' experiences with a brand, it can be more beneficial to use real industries (Kim & Lee, 2018; Tao & Ferguson, 2015). Thus, the use of an imaginary fashion brand may have influenced the results of this research, especially in relation to specific variables, such as CCI.

Secondly, another limitation of this research is related to the sample. Specifically, the sample size of this research can be a limitation, which was set at 184 participants. A larger sample can contribute to a better representation of the population (Bryman, 2016). Randomization can be also more effective in larger sample sizes, which contributes to the internal validity of the research (Neuman, 2014). Especially for mediation analysis, the sample size plays a major role in the findings (Hayes, 2009). Another limitation in relation to the sample of this research, is the use of non-probability convenience samples. To be precise the research was distributed mainly to the personal network of the researcher, which could lead to selection bias (Neuman, 2014). Despite the fact that the study tried to prevent this at a point, by resharing the survey to different Facebook and WhatsApp groups, as well as by asking participants to share in their network, it would be more effective for the results, if the whole survey was distributed beyond the personal network of the researcher.

Thirdly, another limitation of this study is the use only of mediators and not moderators. To be precise, the use of moderators could maybe explain why some relationships are found insignificant, as they can influence the effect size and power of a variable (Bryman, 2016). For example, "subjective norms" have been proved as an influential factor in the consumers buying intentions of green products, as well as to their negative eWOM intentions (Halim et al., 2022). Thus, the use of subjective norms as a moderator could expand the results of the

present research and contribute to a better understanding of consumers' eWOM and buying intentions to sustainable fashion products.

5.4 Directions for future research

CSR and consumers' outcomes are topics widely researched in the literature, due to the rise of socially responsible behaviors across different industries. EWOM and purchasing intentions are also subjects that many scholars had researched during the last decades. Nevertheless, there is still space for research on the topic of transparency in the CSR communication context and its effects on stakeholders. Thus, according to the findings and limitations of the present research, several directions for future research are suggested in this section.

To begin with, this study examined how transparency in the CSR communication in the social media platform Facebook, could influence consumers' eWOM and purchasing intentions. This study used Facebook as it is widely used from corporations (Reilly & Hynan, 2014). However, it is suggested for future researchers to examine transparency of the fashion industry in different types of marketing practices and other social media platforms. Fashion brands widely use Instagram to promote different CSR activities (Kwon & Lee, 2021). As Instagram influencers marketing is extensively used by fashion retailers for advertising purposes, it would be valuable for future research to expand the topic of transparency in relation to influencers marketing of sustainable fashion products on Instagram.

Secondly, in this research most of the respondents were young people, as the mean score of participants' age was approximately 31 years old. Future researchers could focus on the effects of CSR transparency on older generations. Previous study has shown that older generations are more willing to purchase eco-friendly products, than younger generations (Witek and Kuzniar, 2021). In contrast, younger people are more sensitive and concerned about environmental issues due to the use of web-based platforms which reinforce the distribution of information regarding environmental topics (Kanchanapibul et al., 2014). Therefore, future research could be directed to older people to identify how CSR transparency affects their attitudes toward different products and corporations.

Thirdly, as mentioned in the previous section (see 5.3), this study used a fictitious apparel industry for the experimental material. It is suggested for future researchers to use the same model but focus on real-world examples of the actual CSR communication of real fashion industries, as in this way some variables may work in a different way. Additionally, it

is proposed for future empirical research to test other aspects of CSR in relation to transparency, as well as different stakeholders' groups. This study used environmental sustainability of fashion industries within the CSR communication context. Future research could focus on social CSR initiatives, such as unethical labor conditions, as individuals tend to be very critical with these elements (Haug & Busch, 2015). It is also suggested, the model to be tested to different stakeholders' groups, such as employees and investors.

6. Conclusion

During the last decades, consumers' demands regarding socially responsible practices of fashion industries had increased, and as a result these corporations had integrated more sustainable practices in their day-to-day operations. With the rise of social media platforms, the way companies communicate their CSR practices through multiple channels play a major role in their relationship with consumers. Transparency can strengthen this relationship among corporations and consumers, by creating positive consumers' attitudes toward the brands.

This study provided significant insights in relation to the effects of different levels of CSR transparency on consumers' positive or negative eWOM and purchasing intentions, examining at the same time the mediating effects of trust and consumer-company-identification. This research contributed to the academic literature regarding CSR, transparency, eWOM and purchasing intentions. By adding the mediating effects of trust and CCI in the relationship of the aforementioned variables, this study suggests a different model from what can be found in the existing literature. It can also be an inspiration to practitioners in the fashion industry, to consider transparent communication strategies in the promotion of their sustainable practices. As the topic of transparency in CSR is an insufficient researched topic, suggestions for future research are provided.

To sum up, the findings of this research showed that higher levels of transparency in CSR communication of fashion industries lead to higher consumers' intentions to participate in positive eWOM. Nevertheless, no significant differences were found among the different CSR levels (high & low) with negative eWOM and purchasing intentions. In addition, based on the findings trust fully mediates the relationship between CSR transparency and positive eWOM intentions. Furthermore, even though no mediation effects were found for trust to the relation between CSR transparency with negative eWOM and purchasing intentions, the findings revealed indirect effects. Regarding the mediator CCI, no mediating or indirect effects were found for none of the dependent variables with CSR transparency. This can be explained due to the use of an imaginary fashion industry for experimental purposes. A real company could have revealed different findings for this variable, which would be in line with the academic literature. The aforementioned results emphasize the importance of transparency in the communication strategies of fashion industries, as it can increase consumers' trust and their intentions to advocate positively for the company in social media platforms.

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Appendix A

Complete experiment in Qualtrics

Welcome message and consent

Dear participant,

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey.

This study is conducted by a master student of Media and Business at Erasmus University of Rotterdam. The questions of the survey are related to the sustainable practices of fashion industries and consumers' behaviors.

Your participation in this research is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any point during the study. Your responses will be kept completely confidential and anonymous. The data collected will be processed solely for the purposes of this study.

The study should take you around five minutes to complete. Please carefully read the questions and click to the answer that best represents your opinion. There are no right and wrong answers.

If you have any questions, you can send an email to the following email address:

625316lk@student.eur.nl

By clicking the consent button below, you acknowledge that you are aware of the information above and agree to begin the survey.

I consent, begin the study (1)

High transparency condition

Please carefully read the text below:

Fashion Transparency Index is an annual review provided by the non-profit global movement "Fashion Revolution", which ranks fashion companies according to their level of transparency on the information provided about their social and environmental efforts. Transparency in the fashion industries means the disclosure of information about supply chains and business practices and the impacts of these practices on the environment and society.

On the next page, you are about to see a Facebook post from a fashion brand called "Naranjas

*Fashion". According to the Fashion Transparency Index 2021, "Naranjas Fashion" has a **high** level of transparency.*

Please carefully read the text of the Facebook post on the next page. You will be asked to answer some questions about your opinion for this company afterwards.

Facebook post

Please carefully read the text below.



Naranjas Fashion

Yesterday at 4:45am · 🌐

Sustainability is one of the main core values of our company. For this reason, we are happy to announce the launch of our new sustainable collection, which includes unique designs from hoodies to T-shirts and is now out in our stores.

The clothes from this collection were made by transforming PET bottles from Indonesian islands into recycled polyester. Within this project we save natural resources and decrease our environmental footprint of our garments by giving a second life to plastic bottles waste.

During the past year, 70% of our materials were from recycled or more sustainable sources and 100% of our cotton was organic, recycled or sourced in a more sustainable way. We also managed to achieve a 35% reduction in packaging.

But our sustainability efforts do not stop here. Our ambition is to become a circular business that is climate positive by 2040.

You can find our new collection and more info about our sustainability practices on our website.



👍❤️😂 167k

84 Comments 25 Shares

👍 Like

💬 Comment

➦ Share

Low transparency condition

Please carefully read the text below:

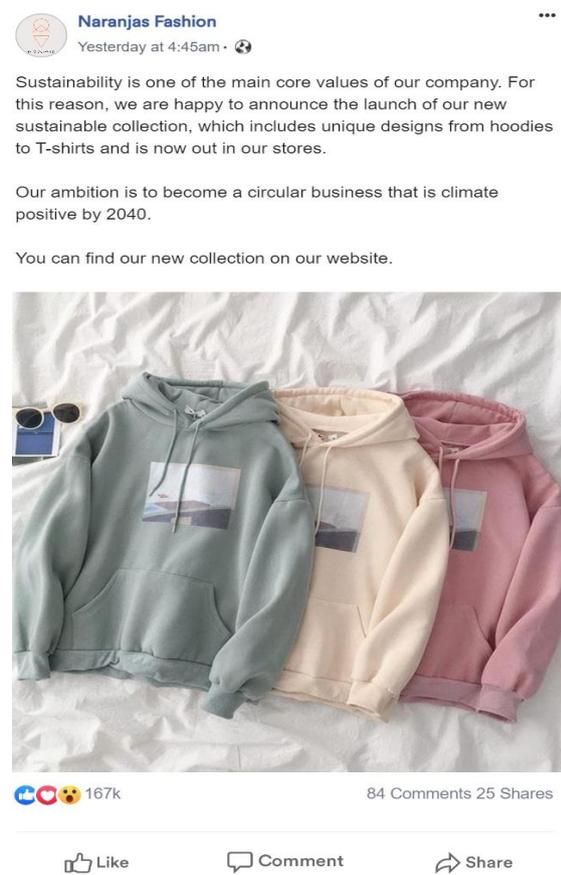
Fashion Transparency Index is an annual review provided by the non-profit global movement "Fashion Revolution", which ranks fashion companies according to their level of transparency on the information provided about their social and environmental efforts. Transparency in the fashion industries means the disclosure of information about supply chains and business practices and the impacts of these practices on the environment and society.

*On the next page, you are about to see a Facebook post from a fashion brand called "Naranjas Fashion". According to the Fashion Transparency Index 2021, "Naranjas Fashion" has a **low** level of transparency.*

Please carefully read the text of the Facebook post on the next page. You will be asked to answer some questions about your opinion for this company afterwards.

Facebook post

Please carefully read the text below.



Naranjas Fashion Yesterday at 4:45am · 🌐

Sustainability is one of the main core values of our company. For this reason, we are happy to announce the launch of our new sustainable collection, which includes unique designs from hoodies to T-shirts and is now out in our stores.

Our ambition is to become a circular business that is climate positive by 2040.

You can find our new collection on our website.



👍👍👍 167k 84 Comments 25 Shares

👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

Control Condition

On the next page, you are about to see a Facebook post from a fashion brand called "Naranjas Fashion".

Please carefully read the text of the Facebook post on the next page. You will be asked to answer some questions about your opinion for this company afterwards.

Facebook post

Please carefully read the text below.



We are happy to announce the launch of our new collection, which includes unique designs from hoodies to T-shirts and is now out in our stores.

You can also find our new collection on our website.



👍❤️😱 167k

84 Comments 25 Shares

👍 Like

💬 Comment

➦ Share

Manipulation check

Thank you for reading this Facebook post. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement regarding the brand that you just saw?

"Naranjas Fashion is a high transparent brand regarding sustainability".

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat disagree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Agree (6)
- Strongly agree (7)

Trust

Morality

Please indicate how you estimate the following characteristics of the presented fashion company "Naranjas Fashion".

	Very low (1)	Low (2)	Slightly low (3)	Neither low nor high (4)	Slightly high (5)	High (6)	Very high (7)
Honesty (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sincerity (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Trustworthiness (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Competence

Please indicate how you estimate the following characteristics of the presented fashion company "Naranjas Fashion".

	Very low (1)	Low (2)	Slightly low (3)	Neither low nor high (4)	Slightly high (5)	High (6)	Very high (7)
Competence (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Intelligence (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Skillfulness (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Consumer-Company-Identification

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the fashion brand "Naranjas Fashion" that you saw before?

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
I believe that the values of the brand "Naranjas Fashion" are similar to my values. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am very interested in what others think about "Naranjas Fashion" brand. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am interested on the related information and development of the brand "Naranjas Fashion". (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When someone praises "Naranjas Fashion" brand, it feels like a personal compliment. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When someone criticizes "Naranjas Fashion" brand, it feels like a personal insult. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Positive eWOM

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the Facebook post that you saw before?

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
I would “like” this post on Facebook. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would post a positive comment under this post. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would share this post with friends. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would say positive things about the company on Facebook. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would recommend the products of this company to friends. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would start to follow the Facebook page of the company. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Negative eWOM

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the Facebook post that you saw before?

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
I would post a negative comment under this post. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would share this post on Facebook with my friends to express negative feelings about the company. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would be willing to say negative things about the company on Facebook. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would say negative things about the fashion products of this company. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Purchasing intentions

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the brand "Naranjas Fashion" and its post that you saw before?

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)	Click to write Scale Point 6 (8)
I would like to try this brand. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would buy other products of this brand. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would buy products of this brand if I happen to see it in the store. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would actively seek out this brand in the store in order to purchase it. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Facebook account

Do you have a Facebook account?

No (1)

Yes (2)

Frequency of usage

How often do you use Facebook?

Very often (1)

Often (2)

Sometimes (3)

Rarely (4)

Never (5)

Demographics

Age

What is your age?

Gender

What gender do you identify as?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Other (3)
- Prefer not to say (4)

Education

What is your educational level?

- Non prior formal education (1)
- Less than high school degree (2)
- High school graduate (3)
- Associate degree (4)
- Bachelor's degree (5)
- Master's degree (6)
- Doctoral degree (7)
- Professional degree (JD, MD) (8)

Income

What is your current annual income?

- Less than €24.999 (1)
- €25.000 to €49.999 (2)
- €50.000 to €74.999 (3)

€75.000 to €99.999 (4)

More than €100.000 (5)

I don't know (6)

Prefer not to say (7)

Debriefing message

You have come to the end of the questionnaire. In this study, we were interested in your opinion on different levels of message transparency of fashion industries' sustainable practices. For the purposes of the study, a fictitious fashion brand has been used in order to reduce the impact of a company's reputation on your opinion.

In the presented Facebook post, some of you may have read specific information about the sustainable tactics of the fictitious brand. This information was based on H&M's sustainable practices.

We have also referred in some cases to the Fashion Transparency Index 2021. You can find more information about this report in the following

link: <https://www.fashionrevolution.org/about/transparency/>

Thank you for your participation! If you have any questions for the study, please contact us by email to 625316lk@student.eur.nl

Appendix B

Scales used in the experiment

Variable/ Construct	Question	Source
Manipulation check	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement regarding the brand that you just saw? “Naranjas Fashion is a high transparent brand regarding sustainability”.	No source
Trust (Morality)	Sincerity of “Naranjas Fashion” brand Honesty of “Naranjas Fashion” brand. Trustworthiness of “Naranjas Fashion” brand.	Leach et al. (2007)
Trust (Competence)	Competence of “Naranjas Fashion” brand. Intelligence of “Naranjas Fashion” brand. Skillfulness of “Naranjas Fashion” brand.	Leach et al. (2007)
CCI	I believe that the values of the brand "Naranjas Fashion" are similar to my values. I am very interested in what others think about “Naranjas Fashion” brand. I am interested on the related information and development of the brand "Naranjas Fashion". When someone praises “Naranjas Fashion” brand, it feels like a personal compliment. When someone criticizes “Naranjas Fashion” brand, it feels like a personal insult.	Deng & Hu (2017)
Positive eWOM intention	I would “like” this post on Facebook. I would post a positive comment under this post. I would share this post with friends. I would say positive things about the company on Facebook. I would recommend the products of this company to friends. I would start to follow the Facebook page of the company.	Eisingerich et al. (2015)

Negative eWOM intention	<p>I would post a negative comment under this post.</p> <p>I would share this post on Facebook with my friends to express negative feelings about the company.</p> <p>I would be willing to say negative things about the company on Facebook.</p> <p>I would say negative things about the fashion products of this company.</p>	Eisingerich et al. (2015)
Purchasing intention	<p>I would like to try this brand.</p> <p>I would buy other products of this brand.</p> <p>I would buy this brand if I happen to see it in the store.</p> <p>I would actively seek out this brand in the store in order to purchase it.</p>	Lee et al. (2020)
Filler questions	<p>Facebook account</p> <p>Frequency of Facebook usage</p>	No source
Demographics	<p>Age</p> <p>Gender</p> <p>Educational Level</p> <p>Annual income</p>	No source