

# Corporate-NGO partnerships in the oil and gas industry:

An experimental study on how aspects of social alliances shape  
consumer outcomes

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### **ABSTRACT**

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become an indispensable aspect of business operations, particularly within the oil and gas industry, which seeks to enhance its legitimacy through CSR initiatives. Due to the industry's immense impact on the environment and its rich history of climate denial, CSR has emerged as a crucial component of firms in the industry obtaining a 'social license to operate'. Particularly popular nowadays are corporate-NGO partnerships, because they offer oil and gas companies greater legitimacy in the eyes of consumers and regulators. This thesis set out to investigate how three aspects of corporate-NGO partnerships interact in order to shape consumer attitudes and negative word-of-mouth. Furthermore, the research examines the mediating role of perceived company motives in these relationships, through the lenses of attribution theory.

A 2 (CSR fit: high/low) x 2 (partnership duration: long/short) x 2 (CSR domain: environmental/social) between-subjects experimental design was employed, with a sample of 402 participants recruited via the crowdsourcing platform Prolific. This thesis set out to investigate CSR domain as a separate concept from fit, instead of treating it as a constituent part, similarly to previous literature. It was found that both fit and domain play an important role in how consumers perceive a given CSR initiative and their subsequent negative word-of-mouth intentions. Furthermore, the results indicate that partnership duration significantly influences consumer attitudes toward CSR initiatives. Longer partnerships were found to lead to more favourable consumer attitudes compared to shorter partnerships. The findings of this research support attribution theory, suggesting that consumers' perceptions of company motives mediate the impact of CSR initiatives on their attitudes and NWOM. When consumers perceive the company's motives as intrinsic, their attitudes are more favourable, and their NWOM is minimised, where the opposite effects are observed, when consumers perceive extrinsic motives. These insights underscore the importance of strategic CSR planning in corporate-NGO partnerships, particularly the significance of partnership duration and the careful alignment of CSR fit and domain. This study offers insights for theorists and managers alike for how fit, domain and partnership duration interact in order to shape consumers' attitudes and behaviours in the oil and gas industry.

Keywords: *Corporate Social Responsibility, Non-governmental organisations, Partnerships, Consumer attitudes, Negative Word-of-Mouth*

## Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>5</b>
1.1	Relevance.....	7
1.2	Chapter outline.....	8
<b>2</b>	<b>Theoretical Framework.....</b>	<b>9</b>
2.1	CSR in the energy sector .....	9
2.2	Opportunities and risks of corporate-NGO partnerships.....	11
2.2.1	Corporate-NGO partnerships from the firm perspective .....	11
2.2.2	Corporate-NGO partnerships from the NGO perspective.....	11
2.3	CSR communication.....	12
2.3.1	Consumer outcomes .....	12
2.4	Aspects of cross-sector CSR partnerships .....	14
2.4.1	CSR Fit .....	14
2.4.2	Partnership duration .....	16
2.4.3	CSR domain.....	16
2.4.4	The mediating role of perceived motives for CSR engagement.....	18
2.4.5	The moderating role of fit .....	18
2.5	Conceptual model.....	19
<b>3</b>	<b>Method .....</b>	<b>21</b>
3.1	Research design .....	21
3.2	Sampling and data collection .....	21
3.2.1	Sampling Criteria and Demographics .....	22
3.2.2	Sample .....	22
3.3	Stimulus material .....	23
3.4	Experimental procedure.....	24
3.4.1	Experimental scenarios pre-test.....	24
3.4.2	Pilot study.....	25
3.4.3	Experimental survey procedure .....	25
3.5	Operationalisation of key variables.....	26
3.5.1	Main concepts .....	26
3.5.2	Manipulation checks .....	27
3.6	Validity and reliability .....	27
<b>4</b>	<b>Results .....</b>	<b>29</b>
4.1	Preliminary analyses.....	29

4.1.1 Random assignment to conditions .....	29
4.1.2 Manipulation checks .....	29
4.1.3 Correlation analysis .....	30
4.2 Direct and interaction effects on consumer outcomes .....	31
4.2.1 Effects on consumer attitudes.....	31
4.2.2 Effects on NWOM .....	32
4.3 Mediation effects .....	32
4.3.1 The mediating effects of perceived intrinsic motives .....	32
4.3.2 The mediating effects of perceived extrinsic motives.....	34
4.4 Additional analyses .....	37
4.4.1 The effects of gender.....	37
4.4.2 The effects of corporate-NGO partnership aspects on perceived motives.....	37
<b>5 Discussion and conclusion .....</b>	<b>39</b>
5.1 Main findings.....	39
5.1.1 The interrelatedness of fit and domain .....	39
5.1.2 The key role of partnership duration .....	40
5.1.3 Perceived motives .....	41
5.1.4 The effect of gender .....	42
5.2 Theoretical implications .....	42
5.3 Practical implications .....	44
5.4 Limitations and directions for future research.....	45
5.5 Conclusion .....	47
<b>Reference list .....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Appendix 1 .....</b>	<b>60</b>

## 1 Introduction

Climate change is an undeniable reality, unequivocally supported by the scientific community (IPCC, 2023, p.4). Yet, climate change is not just a topic of interest for academia, but for the majority of people around the world (Poushter et al., 2022, p.3). The biggest contributor to this environmental crisis is the oil and gas industry, which is responsible for more than 40% of global cumulative industrial emissions (Grasso, 2019, p.11). However, due to the growing public concern and regulatory pressures, companies within this sector have increasingly turned to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a strategy to gain legitimacy and continue their operations. Indeed, the sector's embracement of CSR is not a recent phenomenon, as the industry as a whole was spending more than US\$500 million on CSR as early as 2001 (Frynas, 2005, 581). Nevertheless, the industry's CSR actions have been met by large doses of criticism (Du & Vieira, 2012, p.415). There are two main reasons for this predicament that the sector is facing.

Firstly, oil and gas companies have a long history of climate change denial. As global warming posed a direct threat to companies' economic sustainability, 'the fossil fuels industry pioneered the charge against climate science and policy making' (Dunlap & McCright, 2011, p.148). Considering that many oil and gas firms were still actively lobbying against tougher climate change regulations even well-after the turn of the millennium, it becomes clear why the public can be sceptical of any CSR claims coming from firms in the sector. While scepticism stemming from the active climate change denial of the oil and gas industry is a challenge that the sector brought upon itself, the second factor contributing to consumer scepticism is largely unavoidable, as it stems from the fact that the core business of these firms is considered controversial. Indeed, research has found that some economic sectors are deemed controversial, due to their 'products, services or concepts that for reasons of delicacy, decency, morality, or even fear elicit reactions of distaste, disgust, offence or outrage when mentioned or when openly presented' (Wilson & West, 1981, p.92). Controversial industries nowadays are commonly understood to be those that are characterised by social taboos and moral debates (e.g. adult entertainment and tobacco), as well as those that cause environmental, social or ethical issues (e.g. oil and gas) (Cai et al., 2012, p.468).

Due to the heightened scepticism of these firm's CSR efforts, businesses have increasingly started to seek partnerships with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), due to the recognition of the potential for value they bring through legitimacy (Lyra et al., 2017). While historically, corporations had an adversarial relationship with NGOs, in recent years a shift can be observed (Hussler & Payaud, 2018, p.115). One of the antecedents for this is the growing importance of NGOs, which has happened because of a decrease in the power of nation states (Dempsey, 2011, p.450), as well as the wide-spread adoption of novel communication technologies that have allowed NGOs to more effectively communicate their goals and efforts (Dempsey, 2011, p.454). This has shifted the

role of NGOs from mere critics of corporate actions to an involved stakeholder (Helming et al., 2016, p.170). As such, a new different type of relationship between corporations and NGOs began to emerge - one of partnership and working towards a common goal (Yaziji & Doh, 2009, p.124).

As already discussed, in the context of the oil and gas industry, CSR engagement is often targeted at improving stakeholder relations (Frynas, 2010, p.176). More specifically, considering the high scepticism that firms in the sector are faced with there are two major consumer outcomes that companies strive to achieve, with the first one being elevating consumer attitude towards the brand. Previous studies have established that an effective CSR campaign can act as a shield against controversies and backlash (Yaziji & Doh, 2009, p.130). As such improving consumer's attitude towards a company operating in a controversial industry can create a certain amount of goodwill that can act as a buffer in the event of a public-relations crisis (Shumate and O'Connor, 2010, p.600). However, the literature has also shown that there is another outcome of successful CSR partnerships that is desirable for energy companies - a decrease in negative word-of-mouth (NWOM). Due to the controversial nature of the industry, companies operating in it are associated with a negative effect on the environment and society, which impacts people's NWOM intentions (Mar García-de los Salmones et al., 2021). Companies aim to minimise such behaviour as it can impact their reputation as well as have a negative effect on their financial performance (Gomez-Carrasco & Michelon, 2017, p.868).

It is important to highlight that consumers do not value all corporate-NGO partnerships equally and instead take into account a variety of factors. One such factor that has enjoyed large amounts of academic attention is fit, which refers to the congruence between a company's core business and the cause it supports. This aspect of CSR initiatives has been subject to large amounts of academic discussion; however, it has also been continuously shown to be a key determinant of CSR success (Kim & Choi, 2022, p.12; Zasuwa, 2017, p.11). Yet, fit is also a very broad concept that in many studies has included other concepts such as constituent parts of itself. The domain of CSR activities is one such constituent concept and this research will aim to expand extant knowledge, by examining the individual and interaction effects between fit and domain. As such this thesis adopts a narrower interpretation of fit as the congruence between a firm's core business and supported cause (Du et al., 2010, p.12). The third aspect of corporate-NGO partnerships that this research will examine is partnership duration. All three of these aspects have been identified to positively influence consumer outcomes individually, yet their combined effect has not been previously explored, especially in relation to companies operating in the oil and gas sector (Zhou & Ki, 2017, 81; Cader et al., 2022, p.7996). It is important to acknowledge that the combined effects of fit and partnership duration have been previously studied focusing on other industries (Harrison et al., 2022,

p.8; Vafeiadis et al., 2021, p.282). This study aims to expand extant research by not only investigating the effects of these variables in the oil and gas sector, but also by treating domain as an additional separate factor, instead as a constituent part of fit.

It is likely that the way consumers perceive a given CSR initiative can affect their attitudes and behaviours vis-a-vis the company, as academic literature has found that the effects of CSR on consumer outcomes are largely dependent on whether consumers attribute the company's motives for engaging in CSR to intrinsic (public-serving) or extrinsic (firm-serving) motives (Bae, 2018, p.203; Yoo & Lee, 2018, p.11). In order to understand how all of these concepts interact and shape consumer outcomes, this thesis will aim to answer the following research question:

*To what extent do CSR fit (high vs. low), CSR domain (environmental vs. social), and partnership duration (long vs. short) affect consumer attitudes and NWOM when communicating corporate-NGO partnerships? How do perceived motives mediate these relationships?*

## **1.1 Relevance**

This research aims to expand extant knowledge in several distinct ways. First, this project addresses a gap in the CSR literature regarding the distinctiveness of fit and domain. Dincer and Dincer (2022, p.9) posit that categorising sustainable communication as either congruent or incongruent can provide a limited understanding of how consumers perceive and evaluate sustainable communication and that other factors such as CSR domain may also play a role in this regard. As such this paper will aim to answer this call and investigate the distinct and combined roles of CSR fit and CSR domain, thus contributing to the existing body of literature. Second, this research will aim to examine partnership duration as an important factor in consumers' evaluation of social alliances. Previous literature examining partnership duration has been confined to conventional industries (Vafeiadis et al., 2021, p.282; Wang & O'Connor, 2022, p.678; Waymer et al., 2022, p.266), while this research sets out to explore how partnership duration affects consumer outcomes in a controversial industry like oil and gas, which is faced with elevated levels of scrutiny from regulators and consumers alike (Torugsa et al., 2013, p.383). Thirdly, this thesis will examine how different aspects of corporate-NGO partnerships influence consumers' perceptions of the companies' motives behind such partnerships, thus contributing to attribution theory. Extant research on corporate-NGO partnerships, has not examined how the aspects of said partnerships impact consumers' motives attributions, especially in a controversial sector as the oil and gas industry.

Lastly, this thesis is of academic relevance, as previous research that focused on CSR communication for controversial industries has favoured looking at existing companies by examining

their CSR reports or external databases that compile such information (e.g. Berkowitz et al., 2017; Cai et al., 2012; Conte et al., 2023; Du & Vieira, 2012; Jo & Park, 2020; Song & Wen, 2020; Vollero et al., 2019). Hence, this paper expands extant literature by its employment of an experimental design using fictitious organisations, thus better understanding and isolating the respective and combined effects of CSR fit, CSR domain and partnership duration.

In addition to its theoretical relevance, this research also has societal relevance. The findings of this thesis can aid practitioners by providing clarity into how consumers respond to different types of CSR implementation. Thus, CSR managers can better adapt their strategies during the CSR formulation stage as described by Fatima and Elbanna (2023, p.113). By better understanding the interplay between CSR fit, CSR domain and partnership duration, practitioners can create CSR strategies that can cost-effectively improve consumer outcomes.

## **1.2 Chapter outline**

The following five chapters are aimed at providing a clear and transparent overview of the steps taken in order to answer the research question that underpins this thesis. Chapter two examines the theoretical rationale behind the research by discussing insights from the literature on CSR communication. Furthermore, each aspect of corporate-NGO partnerships that are of interest in this study are extensively examined and several hypotheses are formulated. Chapter three describes how this empirical study was conducted by providing details on how the experiment was designed, as well as how individual concepts were measured among others. Chapter four presents the statistical results and hypotheses testing. In the final chapter, these findings are discussed and interpreted by comparing and contrasting them to extant literature. In the end, both the theoretical and practical implications of this research are highlighted.



## **2 Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 CSR in the energy sector**

While CSR has become an integral part of contemporary business practices, and as such has been subject to large amounts of research (Akhouri & Chaudhary, 2019, p.355), the literature so far has not embraced a specific definition for CSR that encompasses all of its dimensions. A commonly cited definition comes from Waddock (2008, p.10), who describes CSR as “company’s voluntary/discretionary relationships with its societal and community stakeholders”. However, while this definition explicitly describes CSR as entirely voluntary, other definitions that commonly occur in the literature such as the European Commission’s (2011, p.6) interpret it more broadly “the responsibility of enterprises for their impacts on society”. Yet, a more holistic definition comes from Sheehy (2015, p.639), who suggests that by taking an institutionalist approach, CSR should be interpreted as “international private business self-regulation”. By viewing CSR as such, it becomes apparent that no CSR initiative or strategy appears in a vacuum, but it is instead moulded by local and international laws, industry-specific standards as well as social norms and expectations (Sheehy, 2015, p.640). A clear example of this form of self-regulation comes from the oil and gas industry, where CSR has been predominantly used to attain organisational legitimacy (Frynas, 2005, p.585; Lyra et al., 2017, p.136).

Legitimacy is a major reason for companies to engage in CSR, yet the literature has identified another benefit - CSR’s effect on financial performance. For example, evidence from the oil and gas industry shows that engaging in CSR activities lowers the financial risk for companies (Shakil, 2021, p.7). Moreover, Cai et al. (2012, p.477) have found that CSR in controversial industries positively influences firm value, suggesting that engaging in the social and environmental dimensions of CSR leads to positive results for the economic dimension as well. This highlights just how imperative it is for companies in the sector to embrace CSR as not only a tool for gaining legitimacy and bettering of public relations, but also as a source of competitive advantage.

Nonetheless, when companies in the sector engage in CSR, they often face elevated levels of scepticism from consumers due to the controversial nature of these firms’ core business (Du & Vieira, 2012, p.415). Hence, scholars have identified that in order to reap the benefits of legitimisation and obtain a ‘social licence to operate’ companies in the sector need to first establish a level of credibility of their CSR (Du & Vieira, 2012, p.415; Kim & Choi, 2022, p.14). One way to achieve this is by the establishment of corporate-NGO partnerships, as this way companies can enjoy a higher degree of legitimacy in the eyes of consumers and regulators (Yaziji & Doh, 2009, p.124). Prior to CSR becoming a business necessity, most partnerships between firms and NGOs were limited to philanthropy, while in the current business landscape, characterised by a higher degree of stakeholder involvement, most corporate-NGO partnerships (also referred to as social alliances or

cross-sector partnerships) are focused on a mutual exchange of expertise, which previous literature describes as transactional partnerships (Austin, 2000, p.71). Consumers themselves also view philanthropy and CSR as distinct, with CSR being a broader more holistic approach (O'Connor et al., 2008, p.346). Austin (2000, p. 72) highlights that while philanthropic relationships are characterised by low levels of (among others): level of engagement, magnitude of resources and strategic value. On the other hand, as such partnerships become more integrated and move away from mere philanthropy on the side of the firms, the partnership begins to both require larger levels of engagement and investments, but also can lead to larger more pronounced benefits in terms of strategic value. Taking this into account this research will focus only on such partnerships and not investigate philanthropic relationships between corporations and NGOs.

Yet, it is vital to acknowledge that corporate-NGO partnerships are a relatively novel phenomenon, as historically, NGOs had adversarial relations with companies, characterised with public advocacy for a change in a company's business practices (Hussler & Payaud, 2018, p.115). Indeed, one of the sectors that has historically been faced with major NGO pushback is the oil and gas industry, due to the inherent social risk stemming from several different factors. Firstly, the sector is responsible for generating large externalities such as pollution and oil spills. As such they are more closely scrutinised by NGOs representing the groups upon which fall the consequences of these externalities (Yaziji & Doh, 2009, p.63). Secondly, the global presence of many oil and gas companies, like Shell, ExxonMobil and BP, predisposes them to heightened NGO attention, because of the different social norms and regulations present in different countries. While this is common for almost all multinational companies, the resource extraction aspect of the energy industry makes companies in the sector particularly vulnerable to public scrutiny (Yaziji & Doh, 2009, p.64). Lastly, the sector has been at the forefront of many conflicts with NGOs over the years as the industry as a whole has developed a reputation of resisting change (Dunlap & McCright, 2011, p.145).

While companies have taken different approaches in engaging with NGOs, the industry has historically been seen as resisting change and an adversary to NGOs (van den Hove et al., 2002, p.17; Skjaereth et al., 2003, p.43). As such many NGOs have an inclination to be extra critical of organisations in this sector (Yaziji & Doh, 2009, p.65). Despite these challenges and industry-specific risks, firms operating in the oil and gas industry have managed to successfully forge partnerships with NGOs (Gardner et al., 2012, p.173).

## **2.2 Opportunities and risks of corporate-NGO partnerships**

### **2.2.1 Corporate-NGO partnerships from the firm perspective**

As previously highlighted, oil and gas corporations seek partnerships with NGOs in order to boost the credibility of their CSR efforts and in turn gain legitimacy. Yet, these partnerships yield a variety of other benefits as well. One of these essential advantages is the awareness of social forces (Yaziji & Doh, 2009, p.128). While companies are focused on the market in which they operate in, NGOs are more aware of what concerns everyday consumers and how public opinions are changing. Therefore, corporate-NGO partnerships can allow companies to proactively take measures to address these social changes, which in turn can give them a competitive advantage (Yaziji & Doh, 2009, p.128). Additionally, NGOs can often possess specialised technical expertise that companies lack, such as better knowledge of emerging technologies (Yaziji & Doh, 2009, p.129). However, the most fundamental benefit that corporate-NGO partnerships provide to companies is that they often act as a deterrent for negative media coverage as they demonstrate a company's commitment to dialogue and improvement. This underscores how cross-sector partnerships can give corporations opportunities to proactively address market concerns and decrease the risk of scandals and negative publicity (Yaziji & Doh, 2009, p.130).

### **2.2.2 Corporate-NGO partnerships from the NGO perspective**

These partnerships bring value not only to companies, but also hold advantages for the NGOs (Yaziji & Doh, 2009, p.138). NGOs can benefit primarily from access to funding that they otherwise would not have gotten, which allows them to better serve communities, especially in regions of the world where national and local governments fail to do so. Furthermore, these partnerships can allow NGOs to gain agenda setting privileges, where they can influence how companies engage in CSR and which issues they target (Arenas et al., 2009, p.176). Nonetheless, engaging in partnerships with corporations holds some risks that are particularly salient for NGOs. The first and most crucial when it comes to partnerships with the oil and gas industry is the risk of perceived greenwashing, as highlighted by Yaziji and Doh:

“NGOs may suffer reputation costs and accusations that they have modified or softened their positions in exchange for corporate donations. This “greenwashing” has emerged as a genuine concern for many NGOs seeking to maintain independence and autonomy while engaging corporations for both resources and expertise.” (Yaziji & Doh, 2009, p.138)

Furthermore, stating an NGOs credibility as a critic of unethical business practices while collaborating with those very businesses can create a perceived inconsistency (Arenas et al., 2009). Again, this is a particular issue for the oil and gas sector, due to its controversial status and its large environmental footprint.

## **2.3 CSR communication**

In order for a company to reap the previously outlined benefits of engaging in corporate-NGO partnerships, it is imperative that they effectively communicate their involvement in such activities to stakeholders (Du & Vieira, 2012, p.415). Yet, companies operating in the energy sector often face two major challenges in this pursuit - 1) a lack of consumer awareness of a company's CSR efforts and 2) elevated levels of suspicion of corporate greenwashing (de Vries et al., 2015, p.152; Du et al., 2010, p.17). Most consumers are not intimately familiar with a given company's comprehensive CSR strategy and often have negative perceptions of companies in the oil sector. Yet, when companies manage to successfully establish themselves as socially responsible, they can use this reputation to shield themselves from potential scandals and mitigate negative media attention (Vanhamme & Grobbsen, 2009, p.280). Further evidence to this effect is provided by Song et al. (2020, p.256), who suggest that for corporations operating in controversial industries, it is imperative to maintain strong corporate reputation and the best way to achieve this is through being socially and environmentally responsible. Moreover, the authors highlight that firms operating in the energy sector are faced with a ceiling effect of corporate reputation, in comparison to firms operating in non-controversial sectors. As such the authors posit that the best way for a company to ensure its profitability is to invest in reputation building by opting for a long-term CSR strategy.

The literature has found that positive organisational outcomes such as CSR induced corporate reputation are in-large part dependent on how particular CSR actions are perceived by consumers (de Vries et al., 2015, p.152). Therefore, for a company to reap the financial benefits outlined above, they first need to ensure that two particular consumer outcomes are achieved first - the reduction of NWOM and the attainment of positive consumer attitudes.

### **2.3.1 Consumer outcomes**

#### **2.3.1.1 Negative word-of-mouth**

One of the most commonly occurring ways for consumers to show their dissatisfaction with an organisation is through NWOM. For the purposes of this research, NWOM is defined as 'interpersonal communication concerning a marketing organisation or product that denigrates the object of the communication' (Laczniak et al., 2001, p.58). As such both in-person word-of-mouth, as

well as electronic word-of-mouth can be considered NWOM, depending on the message. A decrease in NWOM is a crucial factor for an energy firm's CSR strategy as it can create a strong differentiation factor for socially responsible companies, thus contributing to a halo effect that mitigates certain negative externalities (Mar García-de los Salmones et al., 2021, p.593). Furthermore, companies in controversial industries that are seen as socially irresponsible can suffer from an ever-mounting social pressure that is fuelled by NWOM, with Choi et al. (2023, p,12) even suggesting that businesses should prioritise minimising incidents of corporate social irresponsibility over actually promoting their CSR efforts. This is based on evidence by Skowronski and Carlston (1987, p. 696), who suggested that when individuals observe an extremely negative behaviour, they are likely to make categorise the perpetrator of said action negatively, despite previous history of positive behaviour. This is best exemplified as follows: "A person who performs an incredibly evil act might be categorized as evil, regardless of the number of good actions that person performs" (Skowronski & Carlston, 1987, p. 696). Furthermore, Lin-Hi and Müller (2013, p.1934) posit that a positive-negative asymmetry exists, where irresponsible behaviour has a stronger effect than responsible behaviour in one's evaluation of a firm's overall social responsibility. This has been well encapsulated by Skarmeas and Leonidou (2013): 'Few negative cues may overwhelm the cumulative effects of many positive activities, such that the success of CSR programs often depends more on mitigating the "bad" than on accumulating the "good" (p.1837)'. As such it becomes imperative that firms in the oil and gas industry aim to minimise any negative consumer perceptions of their CSR efforts by opting for CSR initiatives that are received more favourably by the general public. Therefore, this study will focus on how CSR messages can act as potential triggers for NWOM.

#### **2.3.1.2 Consumer attitudes**

A vital metric for an energy company's sustainability is its acquisition and retention of a *social licence to operate*, which refers to the "ongoing acceptance or approval of an operation by those local community stakeholders who are affected by it and those stakeholders who can affect its profitability" (Moffat et al., 2016, p.480). As consumers can mount considerable pressure towards regulators, demanding that a socially irresponsible company be punished, it becomes vital for businesses to effectively manage consumer attitudes. Attitudes are understood to represent individuals' overall assessments of themselves, others, objects, and issues (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986, p. 4). According to Fiske and Taylor (2017, p.470), attitudes are often forged quickly and are based on learned rules rather than the content of messages themselves. This implies that people's attitudes towards an energy company are chiefly formed by their existing attitudes toward the industry,

societal norms and learned behaviour instead of the communication stemming from said energy company.

However, the way that individuals respond to CSR initiatives differs depending on whether they perceive the companies' motives for engaging in CSR as selfish or in the public interest (Dincer & Dincer, 2022, p.4; Kelley & Michela, 1980, p.459). According to attribution theory, individuals assign meaning to events by attributing them to either intrinsic factors or extrinsic factors. In the context of CSR, intrinsic motivation reflects consumers' beliefs that CSR actions stem from the company's inherent concerns or ethical values. On the other hand, extrinsic motives refer to consumer's beliefs that actions in the realm of CSR are motivated by a desire to please stakeholders, rather than due to a genuine concern for the public. This research will employ attribution theory in order to contextualise its findings, and better understand the exact mechanisms of consumers' evaluation of a given brand's CSR communication.

While the way CSR information is communicated is of great importance, the actual CSR initiatives that a company undertakes are at the centre of a successful CSR strategy. Previous studies employing attribution theory suggest that the choice of initiatives that a business supports constitute a major part in consumers' motives attribution (Ginder et al., 2021, p.358). Indeed, scholars have found that consumer attitudes are closely linked to consumers' motives attributions behind engagement in CSR (Bae, 2018, p.203; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013, p.1836). As such it becomes imperative to understand how different aspects of corporate-NGO partnerships interact to shape consumers' motive attributions and thus their attitudes and NWOM intentions.

## **2.4 Aspects of cross-sector CSR partnerships**

### **2.4.1 CSR Fit**

The first aspect of corporate-NGO partnerships this research will focus on is CSR fit. This refers to the "perceived congruence between a social issue and the company's business" (Du et al., 2010, p.12). A large body of literature exists on how fit impacts consumers and most researchers agree that a high degree of fit leads to more positive organisational outcomes than a low degree of fit (Chung & Jiang, 2017, p.280; Du et al., 2010, p.12; Harrison et al., 2022, p.8; Schade et al., 2022, p.48). These studies among others posit that high CSR fit has a positive effect on consumers attitudes, because consumers view a firm's CSR initiatives as appropriate when they can clearly observe a strong connection between the cause and the brand. Furthermore, the literature suggests that high CSR fit influences consumers to attribute a company's CSR actions as more altruistic and intrinsically motivated, instead of firm-serving (Alcañiz et al., 2010, p.180).

While so far, fit has often been discussed as a unidimensional concept, some scholars have proposed other ways of examining it. For example, Kim et al. (2012, p.165) posited that when examining corporate-NGO partnerships, three different dimensions of fit should be considered - business, activity and familiarity. Business fit is similar to the definition proposed by Du et al. (2010, p.12) that was discussed earlier, and which will be the main focus of this research. Somewhat similarly, activity fit refers to the similarity between a firm and its NGO partner's cause. To illustrate, if an energy company donates a solar-power installation to a rural hospital through a partnership with Médecins Sans Frontières, that would constitute a high activity fit and low business fit. Familiarity fit refers to the level of popularity that both the NGO and the firm enjoy, where if a popular company partners with a popular NGO that would constitute high familiarity fit. The work of Kim et al. (2012, p.165) serves as a word of caution that fit is a concept of great complexity, especially in the realm of cross-sector partnerships. Therefore, it is pertinent that one does not follow conventional wisdom on CSR fit blindly, and instead approaches the issue critically.

While the literature that focuses on non-controversial industries shows overwhelming evidence that high fit CSR initiatives lead to superior consumer outcomes, when one investigates the case for controversial industries, a different view is presented. Early evidence by Yoon et al. (2006, p.384) demonstrated that when it comes to the oil and gas industry, high CSR fit led to participants evaluating a company more negatively. In the years following this landmark study, similar results were observed in virtually all controversial industries (Austin & Gaither, 2019, p.16; Gaither & Austin, 2016, p.706; Kim & Choi, 2022, p.12; Song & Wen, 2020, p.891). All authors reached the conclusion that firms operating in controversial industries should focus their CSR strategies away from high fit initiatives, as consumers attribute such CSR activities as non-altruistic and self-serving, thereby eliciting negative responses (Kim & Choi, 2022, p.12). Indeed, Austin and Gaither (2019, p.16) argue that high fit CSR activities can have a negative impact on consumer attitudes if the company's core business is perceived as contradicting the CSR cause. For instance, when an oil company supports a CSR campaign focused on combating climate change, consumers may view the company's efforts as disingenuous.

Previous literature supports the assertion that businesses in controversial industries are facing a higher baseline scepticism from consumers, making them predisposed to negative attributions (Du & Vieira, 2012, p.415). The issue is also compounded by the energy industry's rich history of climate denial, which can make high fit CSR activities even more suspicious in the eyes of consumers (Dunlap & McCright, 2011, p.165). A high level of suspicion is expected to lead to both negative consumer attitudes and elevated levels of NWOM intentions. As such this paper posits that:

**H1:** A high CSR fit leads to a) more negative customer attitudes and b) higher level of negative word-of-mouth than low CSR fit.

#### **2.4.2 Partnership duration**

The second aspect of cross-sector partnerships that is of interest in this study is partnership duration. Previous studies that have investigated the role of partnership duration on consumer outcomes have focused on conventional industries, whereas this study will address this gap by examining its role in a controversial industry setting. One such study comes from Wang and O'Connor (2022, p.683), who found that consumers were less likely to engage in anti-corporate behaviour, when they observed longer corporate-NGO partnerships. Meanwhile other scholars have produced the opposite results, suggesting that consumers exhibit a preference for partnerships that are concentrated around a short and specific goal, that directly connect to the nonprofit's mission (Harrison et al., 2022, p.8).

Although these studies present conflicting findings, other scholars, who did not specifically focus on corporate-NGO partnerships but rather on the impact of a firm's overall CSR history or the duration of its commitment to a particular cause on consumers, have identified a clear pattern. Zhou and Ki (2017, p.81) suggest that long-term CSR involvement can decrease the level of CSR scepticism a firm might encounter. Furthermore, the authors recommend that businesses consistently invest in CSR as it can benefit them during crises. Similarly, early work has shown that consumers perceive short-term commitments as driven by a desire to meet stakeholders' expectations rather than reflecting the organisation's principles (Ellen et al., 2006, p. 154). Moreover, evidence suggests that consumers value CSR strategies characterised by longevity and consistency (O'Connor et al., 2008, p.349). Additional evidence for the superiority of longer CSR commitments can be found in attribution theory, where longer partnership duration can be associated with higher levels of effort from corporations, thereby, signalling to consumers the company's genuine internal commitment to the cause (Dincer & Dincer, 2022, p.7). Hence, it is hypothesised that:

**H2:** Long partnership duration leads to a) more positive customer attitudes and b) lower level of negative word-of-mouth than a short partnership duration.

#### **2.4.3 CSR domain**

The third aspect of corporate-NGO partnerships this research will examine is the domain of CSR activities. As previously mentioned, in the oil and gas industry, CSR activities are mainly concerned with environmental and social issues and as such this study will also focus on them. While



a large body of literature exists about CSR fit, the number of studies investigating how the domain of CSR activities impacts consumer perceptions is limited. Nevertheless, the few studies that researched this concept provide some insight into the topic. Jin and Lee (2019, p.13) suggest when evaluating the CSR activities of companies operating in non-controversial industries such as mobile communication, consumers tend to value environmental CSR higher than social CSR, with individuals exhibiting more positive brand attitudes and higher purchase intentions.

Extant research has so far investigated domain as a constituent part of fit instead of as a separate concept (Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006, p.155). Instead of taking this approach, this study aims to isolate and measure the effect of fit and domain separately, and thus contribute to existing knowledge. Nonetheless, as seen in literature about CSR fit, which was discussed above, it can be reasonably expected that there are some differences in how the domain of CSR activities impacts consumers in controversial industries versus non-controversial ones.

While limited, insights from the energy sector do exist and can serve as an indication on how the CSR domain impacts consumers' attitude and behaviour. In the Polish energy sector, Chwiłkowska-Kubala et al. (2021, p.13) found that the energy sector should prioritise the social dimension of CSR as it positively affects both economic and environmental practices. More specifically, the authors posit that, energy companies can create the largest amount of social value primarily by investing in CSR activities in the social domain. The study also suggests that firms ought to ensure that they tailor their CSR efforts towards their employees' needs. Indeed, the notion that CSR is a vital tool for talent acquisition and retention is common across the literature, as it has been shown to contribute to several benefits such as job satisfaction, work engagement and organisational commitment among others (Akhouri & Chaudhary, 2019, p.364; Lee et al., 2013, p.1721; Lin et al., 2022, p.633; Shahzadi et al., 2024, p.10). Another study that also focused on the Polish energy sector revealed similar findings (Cader et al., 2022, p.7996). In it the authors found that the engagement with social CSR was the most significant determinant of gaining competitive advantage. While neither of these studies focused specifically on how the different CSR domains impact consumers, they nonetheless indicated that CSR activities in the social dimension led to more positive organisational outcomes than activities in the environmental dimension. As such it is hypothesised that:

**H3:** A social focused CSR initiative leads to a) more positive customer attitudes and b) lower level of negative word-of-mouth than an environmentally focused CSR initiative.

#### **2.4.4 The mediating role of perceived motives for CSR engagement**

When applying attribution theory to CSR within the energy sector, it can be inferred that a company can positively influence consumers' attitudes by convincing them that its CSR efforts genuinely prioritise societal wellbeing. As previously discussed, when consumers perceive a company's CSR efforts as intrinsically motivated (i.e., stemming from a legitimate concern for the good of the world) they are more likely to have positive attitudes towards such a brand (Bae, 2018, p.203; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013, p.1836). On the other hand, when individuals attribute a company's CSR activities as extrinsically motivated (stemming from external stakeholder pressure) they are more likely to perceive any CSR communication with heightened levels of scepticism and suspect greenwashing (Ginder et al., 2021, p.11). In the context of the energy sector, firms are seen as lacking intrinsic motivation to engage in CSR, hence any communication regarding their concern for the wellbeing of society can often be interpreted as greenwashing (de Vries et al., 2015, p.151).

It is important to highlight that consumers' attributions of corporate-NGO partnerships are still dependent on the essence of the initiative itself. Most scholars see perceived motives playing a mediating role in the relationship between CSR projects and consumer outcomes instead of as antecedents of consumers' attitude and behaviour towards brands (Bae, 2018, p.203; Ellen et al., 2006, p.154; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013, p.1836; Yoo & Lee, 2018, p.11). Indeed, previous studies have found that the effectiveness of CSR is enhanced, if consumers perceive the company's motives for engaging in CSR as sincere (Yoon et al., 2006, p.388). On the other hand, Vlachos et al. (2008, p.177) found that when consumers perceive a CSR activity as being extrinsically motivated, a negative effect on internal and behavioural consumer responses was observed. Borrowing from this evidence it is hypothesised that:

**H4:** The degree of perceived intrinsic motives mediates the relationship between a) CSR type b) CSR fit c) partnership duration and consumer attitudes and NWOM.

**H5:** The degree of perceived extrinsic motives mediates the relationship between a) CSR type b) CSR fit c) partnership duration and consumer attitudes and NWOM.

#### **2.4.5 The moderating role of fit**

The level of CSR fit has been shown to influence the level of elaborative thinking that consumers use, when processing new information (Rifon et al., 2004, p.38; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006, p.165). More specifically, when greater levels of incongruence exist between a firm's core business and the CSR because it supports, consumers will have a more elaborative thinking process in order to understand the reasoning behind it (Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006, p.164). In

conventional industries this effect has been linked to negative consumer outcomes (Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006, p.164; Yoo & Lee, 2018, p.10), however incongruence (low fit) has been repeatedly found to improve consumer outcomes in controversial industries. This study introduces another source of possible incongruity for consumers - domain. As such, it is expected that scenarios with more incongruity (low fit and social domain scenarios) will have an even greater positive effect on consumer outcomes.

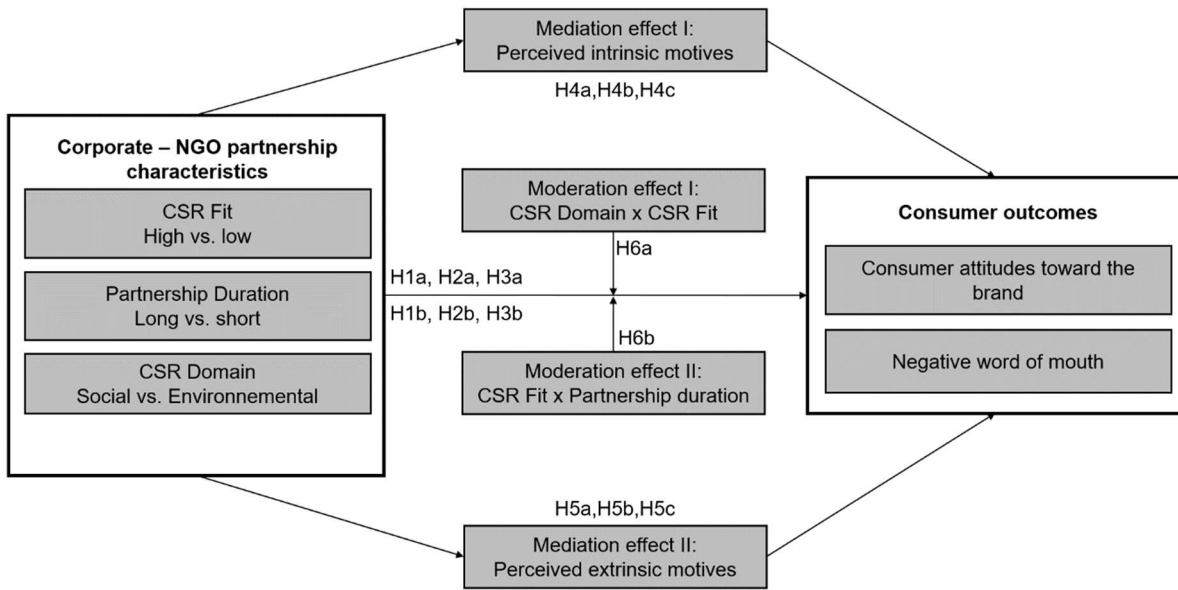
**H6a:** CSR fit moderates the relationships between CSR domain and consumer attitudes and NWOM. When a social initiative is used, low fit leads to more positive consumer attitudes and lower level of NWOM than high fit. When an environmental initiative is used, such an effect does not hold.

Furthermore, as both duration and fit have been demonstrated to influence how consumers perceive the motives behind a CSR campaign, which in turn influence their attitudes and behaviours, it is pertinent to investigate how these two factors together can shape consumer outcomes (Chung & Jiang, 2017, p.280; Du et al., 2010, p.12; Ellen et al., 2006, p. 154; Zhou & Ki, 2017, p.81). Moreover, an interaction effect between fit and duration was found by Harrison et al. (2022, p.6) who observed that in scenarios with high fit and short partnership duration, consumer outcomes were significantly higher. The authors posited that this interaction exists as such partnerships are perceived as “more urgent, timely, and direct” (Harrison et al., 2022, p.8). Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

**H6b:** The effect of partnership duration on consumer attitudes and NWOM is moderated by CSR fit, such that when the duration is short, high CSR fit has a more positive effect on customer attitudes and negative effect on NWOM, than low CSR fit. This effect does not exist for a long partnership duration.

## **2.5 Conceptual model**

An overview of the hypotheses can be found below (Figure 2.5)



**Figure 2.5.** Visual representation of the theoretical model

### **3 Method**

#### **3.1 Research design**

To examine the effect of CSR fit, partnership duration, and CSR domain on consumers' perceptions of a corporate-NGO partnership, a quantitative method was chosen since it can make inferences about bigger populations (Babbie, 2017, p.252). Quantitative methods rely on large and thus more representative samples, which creates a degree of generalisability (Babbie, 2017, p.201). Furthermore, quantitative techniques allow for the investigation of correlational and causal relationships (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.147). Given this study's aim to detect how different aspects of corporate-NGO partnerships cause consumer outcomes an experimental design was chosen, as it allows for different scenarios to be compared and causal relationships to be detected (Neuman, 2014, p.282). Specifically, this study employed a 2 (CSR fit: high/low) x 2 (partnership duration: long/short) x 2 (CSR domain: environmental/social) between-subjects experimental design. Using a factorial design was deemed to be most-appropriate, as it allows for the testing of the effects of each aspect of corporate-NGO partnerships on consumer outcomes individually, as well as their combined effect.

#### **3.2 Sampling and data collection**

The crowdsourcing platform Prolific was utilised in order to gather a sample of individuals, as they are the unit of analysis for this study. Extant research has identified Prolific as providing a more diverse population in comparison to other crowdsourcing platforms such as MTurk (Peer et al., 2017, p.161).

Previous studies have shown that Prolific is a reliable source for the recruitment of participants due to the transparency that it provides (Palan and Schitter, 2018, p.26). The platform is oriented towards researchers and all participants on the platform are aware of their rights and obligations. Additionally, participants can evaluate whether they want to participate in a study, based on its monetary compensation. While Prolific is a reliable platform for the recruitment of participants, its use does not guarantee that participants will not experience disruptions during the survey process, such as environmental distractions (Palan & Schitter, 2018, p.23). This is true for both experiments conducted online as well as in-person, however in online settings this is harder to control (Necka et al., 2016, p.14). In order to minimise the chance that participants get distracted, the survey length was kept to a minimum as advised by Galesic and Bosnjak (2009, p. 358). Furthermore, to check whether participants were filling in the questionnaire attentively, two attention checks were included in the survey. Both attention checks questions asked participants to answer in a specific way, while also explicitly being told that their attention was being checked. This type of attention check questions is classified as instructional manipulation checks (IMCs) by

Oppenheimer et al., (2009, p.870) who found that IMCs can successfully detect participants who are answering questions randomly or are not sufficiently paying attention to the study. An example of the included attention checks is “This question is an attention check. To show that you are paying attention to the questions, you must select 'Strongly disagree'”. Both attention checks were created, by considering Prolific’s attention check policy (Prolific, 2024, para 5). Furthermore, to ensure compliance with Prolific’s rules, participants were excluded from the study, only if they failed both attention checks.

In terms of compensation, each participant received £ 0.50 for their participation. The median completion time as reported by Prolific was 5 minutes and thirty-eight seconds.

Prior to beginning the experiment, all participants were provided with information about their rights as participants, such as their entirely voluntary participation, their anonymity, as well as the right to withdraw from the study at any point. Afterwards participants were asked whether they provided their consent.

### **3.2.1 Sampling Criteria and Demographics**

As this study is focusing on how consumers understand and evaluate corporate-NGO partnerships in a ubiquitous industry such as oil and gas, it was deemed suitable to recruit as broad of a sample as possible that better represents the attitudes of the general consumer. As such, even though Prolific offers the possibility to choose participants based on demographics and psychographics, the only requirement for this study was that all participants were eighteen years or older. The literature advocates for decreasing the usage of sampling criteria, unless necessary, in order to keep the sample’s representativeness high and thus its generalisability (Babbie, 2017, p.230).

### **3.2.2 Sample**

The survey yielded a total of 404 responses. However, two participants failed both attention check questions that were included in the survey, and were thus excluded from the final sample, which led to a final sample size of 402 participants. Participants’ age ranged from 18 to 74 ( $M = 31.36$ ,  $SD = 10.59$ ). 164 of the participants identified as male, which constituted 40.8% of the sample, while 234 identified as female, which corresponds to 58.2%. 3 participants indicated that they are non-binary/third gender (0.7%), while 1 respondent preferred not to share this information (0.2%). The sample consisted of people coming from 42 different countries, with the three most represented countries being South Africa (30.3%), Portugal (13.9%) and Poland (9%). In terms of educational level, the sample consisted of a large proportion of people with a bachelor’s degree (47.3%), followed by

those with a high school diploma (23.9) and master's degree (17.9%). After gathering the data, it was found that all eight groups had a very similar number of participants in each of them, ranging from 48 to 52 participants.

### **3.3 Stimulus material**

The three independent variables – CSR fit, partnership duration, and CSR type – were operationalised across the eight experimental scenarios, each consisting of a short company description on the company's website together with information about the corporate-NGO partnership. The rationale behind choosing the company's website instead of another medium is that it eliminates participants' prior biases against the medium. In the pursuit of eliminating pre-existing biases and thus isolating the causal effects of each of the independent variables both a fictitious company and a fictitious NGO were chosen (Eberle et al., 2013, p.736). While prior research investigating CSR communication in controversial industries has opted for using real companies instead, the use of fictitious organisations eliminates the negative biases that consumers may hold over companies, due to prior crises that the sector is prone to (e.g. the Deepwater Horizon and the Exxon Valdez oil spill disasters or Total's responsibility in the sinking of the oil tanker Erica) (De Roeck & Delobbe, 2012, p.12). The fictitious organisation was chosen to be an oil and gas extraction and refinement company, because similar companies are already familiar to consumers (e.g. Shell, BP, ExxonMobil). The names for the fictitious organisations were chosen to be, Inerxo for the oil and gas corporation and Global Empowerment Organisation (GEO) for the NGO. Participants were exposed to one of the eight experimental conditions (See table 3.3)

Each scenario was carefully considered in order to increase its validity. The high fit environmental scenario aimed to evoke a close connection between the firm's core business and the cause, while also explicitly being focused on energy efficiency, which is connected to minimising the externalities of the oil and gas industry. On the other hand, the low fit environmental scenario was focused on wildlife preservation. The choice for specifying that the corporate-NGO partnership was aimed at preserving sea turtles was twofold - many people are aware that sea turtles are endangered and yet the reason is not the oil and gas industry, but the plastics industry (Rosch, 2024, para 10).

On the social side, for high fit scenarios the partnership was focused on helping communities who have suffered from climate change induced natural disasters. This condition both references climate change (which the oil and gas industry is largely responsible for) (Grasso, 2019, p.11), as well focusing on how it affects people rather than the environment. The final scenarios were focused on the fight against cancer and were largely based on Yoo and Lee's (2018, p.13) work on low and high fit.

**Table 3.3.** Overview of experimental conditions

Fit	Domain	Duration	Scenario description
High		Short	Programme dedicated to promoting energy efficiency among local businesses (3 months)
High	Environmental	Long	Programme dedicated to promoting energy efficiency among local businesses (15 years)
Low		Short	Sea turtles' preservation (3 months)
Low		Long	Sea turtles' preservation (15 years)
High		Short	Aid for communities suffering from climate change induced natural disasters (3 months)
High	Social	Long	Aid for communities suffering from climate change induced natural disasters (15 years)
Low		Short	Fighting against pancreatic cancer (3 months)
Low		Long	Fighting against pancreatic cancer (15 years)

The study also manipulates partnership duration by creating a long and short commitment duration version for each of the previously outlined scenarios. In the short duration scenarios, the corporate-NGO partnership has existed for less than 3 months, while in the long duration scenario the corporate-NGO partnership has been ongoing for over 15 years. These time frames were selected based on a previous study investigating CSR duration (Zhou & Ki, 2017, p.79). A full overview of the whole questionnaire, including the experimental conditions can be found in Appendix 1.

### 3.4 Experimental procedure

#### 3.4.1 Experimental scenarios pre-test

In order to test whether the scenarios successfully convey the desired message, a pre-test of the experiment's materials was conducted. For this purpose, five participants were recruited through convenience sampling and were asked to go over each of the scenarios and provide their feedback about the clarity and quality of the scenarios. The feedback showed that some of the scenarios had to be tweaked for clarity, as well as some of the vocabulary had to be changed, in order to remove jargon. Furthermore, the text detailing Inerxo's operations was also shortened in-line with feedback from some of the participants.



### **3.4.2 Pilot study**

A pilot study was conducted, which allowed for further testing of the clarity of the experimental scenarios as well as the survey flow. In order to achieve this the experiment was devised in Qualtrics. To ensure the quality of the pilot study a considerably larger sample size was employed, through a combination of convenience and snowball sampling, where the researcher recruited participants through their extended network on Facebook and LinkedIn. In the end the pilot study gathered a number of responses that allowed for a detailed inspection of the quality and clarity of the eight experimental scenarios ( $N = 53$ ). After the completion of the survey, participants were encouraged to provide their feedback regarding the experimental scenarios, clarity of the questions and overall survey flow.

After statistical tests were performed, it was evident that several of the manipulations were not successful. While the predictive power of these tests was low, due to the small sample size, it nonetheless indicated that some manipulations should be adjusted. The four experimental scenarios in the social domain in particular were found not successful, which was also confirmed by the feedback some participants shared, which highlighted that these scenarios were unclear. In these scenarios, the manipulation check for fit also showed that the scenarios were insufficiently clear, which led to all four social conditions being rewritten.

### **3.4.3 Experimental survey procedure**

The data collection took place on 23rd of April 2024 and all participants were gathered through Prolific. At the start of the questionnaire, participants were provided with information about their rights and were subsequently asked to provide their informed consent to participate in the experiment. Next, participants were asked to provide their unique Prolific ID.

The experimental treatment consisted of two sections. The first one was a screenshot of Inerxo's About Us webpage, which was static across the conditions. There a short description of the company's operations was displayed. In order to increase the validity of the experiment, the text the participants saw was almost identical to the text on the About Us page of an actual oil and gas company - TotalEnergies (*Our Identity*, n.d., para 1). After that participants were randomly assigned to one of the eight experimental groups outlined in section 3.3. Following this, three manipulation check questions were asked, each testing whether the manipulation of fit, domain and partnership duration respectively were successful. Afterwards, the questions regarding consumer attitudes were shown. Next, participants were asked about their perceived motives behind the company engaging in the corporate-NGO partnership. Finally, NWOM, followed by demographics were measured. In the end participants were provided with a debrief regarding the fictitious nature of

both the firm and the NGO present in the experiment. Participants were also invited to ask the researcher any questions they might have regarding the study via email.

### 3.5 Operationalisation of key variables

#### 3.5.1 Main concepts

In an effort to respect participants time as much as possible and considering the extensive variables of interest, this study will aim to ensure that each variable is measured as concisely as possible, in order to avoid respondent fatigue (Galesic & Bosnjak, 2009, p. 358). Unless indicated otherwise, items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

*Consumer attitudes* was operationalised using a four-item scale by Nan and Heo (2007, p.67). It measures consumer attitudes on a seven-point bipolar scale - unfavourable/favourable, negative/positive, like/dislike and socially irresponsible/socially responsible. The 4 items were entered into a factor analysis on Principal Component extraction with Direct Oblimin rotation, which showed that a single factor explained 83.49% of the variance in consumer attitudes (KMO = .86,  $\chi^2$  ( $N = 402, 6$ ) = 1390.57,  $p < .001$ ). A reliability analysis was conducted which showed very high internal consistency ( $\alpha = .93$ ). Afterwards, a new variable was computed based on the means of the four items, *Consumer attitudes* ( $M = 5.16, SD = 1.28$ ).

*Intrinsic and Extrinsic motives* were measured using a scale by Leonidou and Skarmeas (2017, p.408), where both perceived intrinsic and extrinsic motives will be measured using four-item scales. The scale consisted of eight Likert-scale items, where participants were asked to what extent they agree with a variety of statements regarding the motives of the company to engage in the corporate-NGO partnership, such as: " *I believe that Inerxo engages in a partnership with this non-profit organisation, primarily because its competitors are doing the same*". A Principal Component factor analysis with Direct Oblimin rotation was performed on this scale, which confirmed the expectations set by the literature that two factors consisting of four items each exist. The first factor was found to refer to extrinsic motives and explained 50.97% of the variance in perceived motives, while the second factor grouped all items focused on testing intrinsic motives and explained 21.18% of the variance (KMO = .82,  $\chi^2$  ( $N = 402, 28$ ) = 1924.06,  $p < .001$ ). A reliability analysis was then conducted for both intrinsic and extrinsic motives. The analysis on the former showed high internal consistency ( $\alpha = .87$ ). For the latter, the consistency was also similarly high ( $\alpha = .85$ ). As such two new variables were created based on the mean scores of their respective items - *perceived intrinsic motives* ( $M = 4.59, SD = 1.25$ ) and *perceived extrinsic motives* ( $M = 5.21, SD = 1.20$ ).

*NWOM* was operationalised using a scale by Lee and Cho (2022, p.5), who have adapted a previously existing scale by (Kim et al., 2020, p.20). The scale consisted of three Likert-scale items. An

exemplary item of the scale is “I intend to discredit Inerxo with friends, relatives or other people”. A Principal Component factor analysis with Direct Oblimin rotation showed that a single factor explained 78.19% of the variance in consumer attitudes (KMO = .73,  $\chi^2 (N = 402, 3) = 566.09, p < .001$ ). A reliability analysis was conducted which showed high internal consistency ( $\alpha = .86$ ). Afterwards, a new variable was computed based on the means of the three items, *Consumer attitudes* ( $M = 2.33, SD = 1.21$ ).

### 3.5.2 Manipulation checks

In order to test for the success of the manipulations, three manipulation check questions were included that each measured whether the manipulation of each respective factor was successful. First, the manipulation of fit was tested, by using one item, measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). In order to ensure that participants clearly understand the question, a short description of the concept being tested was provided. As such the manipulation check item for fit was as follows: *The business domain of Inerxo matches with the business domain of the non-profit organisation.*

Next, the successful manipulation of duration was tested. Similarly to the question for fit, a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) was utilised and a description of the concept was provided. The item presented was: *The duration of the partnership between Inerxo and its partner non-profit organisation is less than a year.*

The final manipulation check question concerned CSR domain and was measured on a 7-point bipolar (environmental/social) scale. This approach was taken following feedback from the pilot study where participants reported difficulty understanding the question. The question was phrased as follows: *How would you best describe the focus of the partnership between Inerxo and the non-profit, where environmental focus refers to protecting the environment and wildlife, while social refers to helping individuals and communities?*

### 3.6 Validity and reliability

In order to bolster this study’s validity and reliability several measures were taken. For the purposes of increasing measurement validity, this study relies on pre-existing scales in order to measure concepts, where these scales underwent slight alterations to adapt them to the topic at hand (Babbie, 2017, p.138). To ensure that the measurement instrument is measuring the intended concepts a pilot study was conducted, where a large group of people was recruited, with the purpose of going through the experiment and then giving feedback on the overall experience. This ensured

that the phrasing of items, as well as of the manipulations are effectively portrayed and sufficiently clear.

## 4 Results

### 4.1 Preliminary analyses

#### 4.1.1 Random assignment to conditions

To ensure the robustness of results, two tests were performed to check whether the random assignment was successful. First a Chi-square test for independence was used to test the random assignment of the experimental conditions by gender, which did not yield significant results,  $\chi^2(21, N = 402) = 16.49, p = .741$ ). Next, a one-way ANOVA was employed to check the random assignment to experimental conditions for age, the result of which was also not significant,  $F(7, 394) = 1.12, p = .347$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .02$ ). These results showed that the sample was sufficiently randomised and fit for further analysis, and neither age nor gender had to be included in the proceeding analyses as control variables.

#### 4.1.2 Manipulation checks

To assess the effectiveness of the experiment stimuli, three questions regarding the experiment materials were incorporated at the beginning of the experiment to serve as manipulation checks. To test how successful the manipulations were, first all three manipulations were dummy coded, after which a three-way ANOVA was conducted with each manipulation check serving as the dependent variable and the three conditions as the independent variables.

First, the manipulation check for fit was tested which showed a significant main effect of the fit manipulation,  $F(1, 394) = 15.04, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .04$ ). Participants in high fit conditions ( $M = 4.32, SD = 1.61$ ) reported perceiving a higher fit between the company and the cause than participants in the low fit conditions ( $M = 3.68, SD = 1.74$ ). However, it also showed a significant effect for CSR domain,  $F(1, 394) = 10.30, p = .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .03$ ), where participants in environmental conditions reported perceiving a the cause as having a higher fit ( $M = 4.26, SD = 1.68$ ) than participants in social conditions ( $M = 3.73, SD = 1.69$ ). None of the other effects were significant. Given the interrelatedness of fit and domain, described prior, such results were expected, however, the results should nonetheless be interpreted with caution.

The manipulation check for duration was examined, which showed a significant main effect for the duration manipulation,  $F(1, 394) = 412.10, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .51$ ). The results showed that participants in long duration scenarios ( $M = 2.36, SD = 1.64$ ) indicated that they perceived a longer duration than participants in short duration scenarios ( $M = 5.70, SD = 1.68$ ). No significant effects of fit or domain were observed (all  $p$ 's  $> 0.05$ ) indicating a successful manipulation.

The final manipulation check concerned CSR domain. The results of the analysis showed that a significant main effect for CSR domain,  $F(1, 394) = 114.64, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .23$ ), where participants in environmental manipulations reported perceiving their scenarios as more

environmentally directed ( $M = 2.61, SD = 1.89$ ) than participants in social scenarios ( $M = 4.76, SD = 2.27$ ). A significant effect for fit,  $F(1, 394) = 4.91, p = .027$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .01$ ) was also present, where participants in high fit scenarios ( $M = 3.91, SD = 2.32$ ) perceived their scenarios as more socially focused than those in low fit scenarios ( $M = 3.45, SD = 2.35$ ). Additionally, a significant effect for duration,  $F(1, 394) = 6.08, p = .014$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .02$ ) also existed, which indicated that participants in short duration ( $M = 3.92, SD = 2.32$ ) scenarios perceived their manipulations as more socially centered than participants in long duration scenarios ( $M = 3.43, SD = 2.35$ ). While all manipulation checks were successful as they did show a significant main effect on their respective manipulations, the overlapping significant effects that were observed in the fit and domain manipulations checks indicate that the results should be interpreted with caution. This issue will be discussed in more detail in the limitations section.

#### 4.1.3 Correlation analysis

To check how the different variables correlate with each other, a Pearson's correlation matrix was created (see Table 4.1.3). It showed a significant negative correlation between consumer attitudes and NWOM ( $r_{attitudes-NWOM} = -.56, p < .001$ ), indicating that higher levels of consumer attitudes are associated with lower levels of NWOM intentions. Furthermore, a significant correlation can be observed between both consumer outcomes (NWOM and consumer attitudes) and extrinsic and intrinsic motives. Perceived extrinsic motives exhibited a positive correlation with NWOM ( $r_{extrinsic-NWOM} = .27, p < .001$ ) and a negative correlation with consumer attitudes ( $r_{extrinsic-attitudes} = -.37, p < .001$ ). On the other hand, intrinsic motives showed the opposite effects - ( $r_{intrinsic-NWOM} = -.46, p < .001$ ;  $r_{intrinsic-attitudes} = .69, p < .001$ ). Furthermore, as expected higher levels of perceived intrinsic motives lowered the levels of perceived extrinsic motives ( $r_{intrinsic-extrinsic} = -.42, p < .001$ ). Other findings that are worth noting are regarding the significant correlation between gender and NWOM and perceived motives. These relationships will be probed further in the additional analyses section.

**Table 4.1.3.** Pearson correlation matrix

	1	2	3	4	5	6	Mean	SD
1. NWOM	-						4.46	1.20
2. Consumer attitudes	-.56**	-					5.23	1.13
3. Perceived extrinsic motives	.27**	-.37**	-				5.25	1.55
4. Perceived intrinsic motives	-.46**	.69**	-.42**	-			4.75	1.20
5. Age	-.06	.01	.01	.02	-		31.36	10.59
6. Gender	-.25**	.05	-.14**	.10*	.01	-		

Note. Significance levels \*\* $p < .01$  level (2-tailed), \* $p \leq .05$  (2-tailed).

## 4.2 Direct and interaction effects on consumer outcomes

### 4.2.1 Effects on consumer attitudes

To test the effect of each aspect of cross-sector CSR partnerships as well as their interaction effect on consumer outcomes, a three-way ANOVA was employed. For this purpose, a dummy variable for fit, duration and domain were created. First the ANOVA was conducted with consumer attitudes as the dependent variable. The test found that the main effect of fit on consumer attitudes was not significant,  $F(1, 394) = 0.36, p = .547$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .00$ . Therefore, as no significant difference in low fit ( $M = 5.20, SD = 1.28$ ) versus high fit ( $M = 5.12, SD = 1.28$ ) scenarios existed, **H1a was rejected**. Furthermore, the test showed no significant effect of duration,  $F(1, 394) = 0.89, p = .345$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .00$ . The lack of significant differences between short ( $M = 5.10, SD = 1.32$ ) and long duration ( $M = 5.22, SD = 1.23$ ) meant **H2a had to be rejected**. CSR domain also yielded similar results,  $F(1, 394) = 0.19, p = .661$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .00$ , where no significant differences between environmental ( $M = 5.13, SD = 1.25$ ) and social ( $M = 5.18, SD = 1.30$ ) domains existed, which necessitated that **H3a had to be rejected**. All interaction effects were not found to be significant (all  $p$ 's  $> .053$ ). Based on the lack of significance at the 5% significance level both **H6a (consumer attitudes) and H6b (consumer attitudes) were rejected**.

#### 4.2.2 Effects on NWOM

Another three-way ANOVA was conducted to test effects of fit, duration and domain on NWOM as well as their interactions. It revealed that no significant main effect for fit existed,  $F(1, 394) = 1.44, p = .230$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .00$ . Therefore, as no significant difference in low fit ( $M = 2.26, SD = 1.16$ ) versus high fit ( $M = 2.40, SD = 1.25$ ) scenarios existed, **H1b was rejected**. When examining the effect of duration again the significance threshold was not met,  $F(1, 394) = 2.83, p = .093$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .01$ . The lack of significant differences between short ( $M = 2.43, SD = 1.18$ ) and long duration ( $M = 2.23, SD = 1.23$ ) indicated that **H2b had to be rejected**. Similarly, the effect for domain was also found not to be significant,  $F(1, 394) = 1.01, p = .315$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .00$ . With the difference between environmental ( $M = 2.27, SD = 1.18$ ) and social ( $M = 2.40, SD = 1.24$ ) domains not reaching the significance level, **H3b was rejected**. When examining the interaction effects, the relationship between fit and domain was significant,  $F(1, 394) = 4.58, p = .033$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .01$ . Upon closer inspection, it was found that participants in low fit environmental conditions ( $M = 2.07, SD = 1.01$ ) participants had lower NWOM intentions than participants in high fit environmental conditions ( $M = 2.47, SD = 1.30$ ),  $b = 0.38, p = .025$  CI95% = [0.05, 0.71]. No significant difference between the high fit ( $M = 2.40, SD = 1.25$ ) and low fit ( $M = 2.25, SD = 1.16$ ) conditions was observed in the social domain conditions. This differs from the hypothesised relationship, where the interaction between fit and domain was expected to result in lower NWOM in low fit conditions in the social rather than the environmental domain. No other significant interaction effects were observed (all  $p$ 's > .315). Based on these results, **H6a (NWOM) and H6b (NWOM) were rejected**.

#### 4.3 Mediation effects

##### 4.3.1 The mediating effects of perceived intrinsic motives

###### 4.3.1.1 Fit

To test the hypothesised mediation effects of intrinsic and extrinsic motives a bootstrapping procedure was employed using the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2022, p.79).

Specifically, this analysis employed PROCESS model 4 where fit was entered as the independent variable, perceived intrinsic motives as a mediator and both NWOM and consumer attitudes individually as the dependent variables. First consumer attitudes were examined, where no significant effect of fit on perceived intrinsic motives was observed,  $b = -.12, p = .331$ . Consumer attitudes were positively influenced by intrinsic motives,  $b = 0.70, p < .001$ , but no significant effect of fit was found,  $b = .01, p < .953$ . Furthermore, no indirect mediation effect was observed,  $\beta = -0.09$ , CI95% = [-0.25, 0.08]. As such **H4a (consumer attitudes) was rejected**.



Next the effect on NWOM was examined, where again no significant effect of fit on perceived intrinsic motives was seen,  $b = .00$ ,  $p = .330$ . Yet, a significant negative relationship between perceived intrinsic motives and NWOM exists,  $b = -.44$ ,  $p < .001$ , with fit again showing no significant effect on NWOM,  $b = .09$ ,  $p = .382$ . No indirect mediation was observed,  $\beta = 0.05$ , CI95% = [-0.06, 0.16]. Hence, **H4a (NWOM) was rejected**.

#### 4.3.1.2 Duration

When testing the mediating power of perceived intrinsic motives on the relationship between partnership duration and consumer outcomes, the following effects were observed. When examining consumer attitudes, it was found that a significant effect exists between duration and the perceived intrinsic motives,  $b = .01$ ,  $p = .017$ . Furthermore, perceived intrinsic motives were found to have a significant effect on consumer attitudes,  $b = .71$ ,  $p < .001$ . A significant effect of duration on consumer attitudes was not observed,  $b = -.09$ ,  $p = .353$ , however an indirect effect was present,  $\beta = 0.21$ , CI95% = [0.04, 0.39], which led to **H4b (consumer attitudes) being accepted**.

Next the relationship between NWOM was tested. The effect of duration on perceived intrinsic motives was significant,  $b = .01$ ,  $p = .017$ , as well as the effect of perceived intrinsic motives on NWOM,  $b = -.44$ ,  $p < .001$ . While the effect of duration did not reach the significance level,  $b = -.07$ ,  $p < .498$ , an indirect effect was observed,  $\beta = -0.74$ , CI95% = [-0.24, -0.02]. Therefore, **H4b (NWOM) was accepted**.

#### 4.3.1.3 Domain

When conducting the mediation analysis with domain as the independent and consumer attitudes as the dependent variable the following results were observed. The effect of domain on perceived intrinsic motives did not reach the significance level,  $b = -.07$ ,  $p = .593$ . The effect of perceived intrinsic motives on consumer attitudes was significant,  $b = .71$ ,  $p < .001$ , however the effect of domain on consumer attitudes did not cross the significance threshold,  $b = .10$ ,  $p = .285$  and no indirect mediation effect was observed,  $\beta = -0.05$ , CI95% = [-0.21, 0.12]. Therefore, **H4c (consumer attitudes) was rejected**.

Following this, the analysis was conducted for NWOM, which also did not indicate a significant effect on perceived intrinsic motives,  $b = -.07$ ,  $p = .593$ . The effect of perceived motives did have a significant effect on NWOM,  $b = -.44$ ,  $p < .001$ , while the effect of domain was not significant,  $b = .10$ ,  $p = .377$ , yet no indirect effect was observed,  $\beta = 0.03$ , CI95% = [-0.08, 0.14]. This led to **H4c (NWOM) being rejected**.

### 4.3.2 The mediating effects of perceived extrinsic motives

#### 4.3.2.1 Fit

When examining the effect of fit on consumer attitudes, where perceived extrinsic motives mediate the relationship, no significant effect of fit on the mediator was observed,  $b = .04$ ,  $p = .768$ . Consumer attitudes were positively influenced by extrinsic motives,  $b = -.39$ ,  $p < .001$ , but no significant effect of fit on the dependent variable was observed,  $b = -.07$ ,  $p < .576$ . Furthermore, no indirect mediation effect was observed,  $\beta = -0.01$ ,  $CI95\% = [-0.11, 0.08]$ . As such **H5a (consumer attitudes) was rejected**.

Next the effect on NWOM was examined, where again no significant effect of fit on perceived intrinsic motives was seen,  $b = .04$ ,  $p = .768$ . A significant relationship between perceived extrinsic motives and NWOM was detected,  $b = .27$ ,  $p < .001$ , while fit had no significant effect on NWOM,  $b = .14$ ,  $p = .235$ . No indirect mediation was observed,  $\beta = 0.01$ ,  $CI95\% = [-0.05, 0.07]$ . Hence, **H5a (NWOM) was rejected**.

#### 4.3.2.2 Duration

After testing the mediating power of perceived extrinsic motives on the relationship between duration and consumer outcomes the results were as follows. Duration was found to have a significant effect on consumer attitudes,  $b = .01$ ,  $p = .041$ . A significant relationship was also found between perceived extrinsic motives and consumer attitudes,  $b = -.39$ ,  $p < .001$ . The effect of duration on consumer attitudes was not significant,  $b = .03$ ,  $p = .806$ . However, an indirect mediation effect was present,  $\beta = -0.09$ ,  $CI95\% = [0.04, 0.20]$ . Therefore, **H5b (consumer attitudes) was accepted**. When examining NWOM a similar effect was found. Duration was found to have a significant effect on NWOM,  $b = .01$ ,  $p = .041$ . The effect of perceived extrinsic motives on NWOM also reached the significance level,  $b = .05$ ,  $p < .001$ . The direct effect of duration on NWOM did not meet the significance threshold,  $b = -.14$ ,  $p = .236$ , where an indication of an indirect mediation effect was detected  $[-0.14, 0.00]$ <sup>1</sup>. As such, **H5b (NWOM) being rejected**.

#### 4.3.2.3 Domain

When conducting the mediation analysis with domain as the independent variable, consumer attitudes as the dependent and domain as the mediator the following results were

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<sup>1</sup> The results offered by PROCESS were LLCI  $[-.1380]$  and UCLI  $[-.0003]$ . As the upper and lower confidence levels were closely placed and a zero was not sitting in between them, a conservative approach was taken, hence the test was found to not be significant at the 5% confidence level.

observed. The effect of domain on perceived extrinsic motives did not meet the significance level,  $b = -.11$ ,  $p = .352$ . The effect of perceived intrinsic motives on consumer attitudes was significant,  $b = -.39$ ,  $p < .001$ , however the effect of domain on consumer attitudes was not,  $b = .01$ ,  $p = .947$ . Furthermore, no indirect mediation effect was observed,  $\beta = .04$ , CI95% = [-0.05, 0.14]. Therefore, **H5c (consumer attitudes) was rejected.**

Next the analysis was conducted for NWOM, which also did not indicate a significant effect on perceived intrinsic motives,  $b = -.11$ ,  $p = .352$ . The effect of perceived motives did have a significant effect on NWOM,  $b = .28$ ,  $p < .001$ , while the effect of domain was not significant,  $b = .16$ ,  $p = .182$  and no indirect effect was observed,  $\beta = -.03$ , CI95% = [-0.10, 0.03]. This led to **H5c (NWOM) being rejected.**

An overview of the hypotheses and their results can be found in Table 4.3.2.3.

**Table 4.3.2.3.** Overview of hypotheses test results

<b>Hypothesis</b>	<b>Result</b>
H1a	Rejected
H1b	Rejected
H2a	Rejected
H2b	Rejected
H3a	Rejected
H3b	Rejected
H4a (Consumer Attitudes)	Rejected
H4a (NWOM)	Rejected
H4b (Consumer Attitudes)	<b>Accepted</b>
H4b (NWOM)	<b>Accepted</b>
H4c (Consumer Attitudes)	Rejected
H4c (NWOM)	Rejected
H5a (Consumer Attitudes)	Rejected
H5a (NWOM)	Rejected
H5b (Consumer Attitudes)	<b>Accepted</b>
H5b (NWOM)	Rejected
H5c (Consumer Attitudes)	Rejected
H5c (NWOM)	Rejected
H6a (Consumer Attitudes)	<sup>a</sup> Rejected
H6a (NWOM)	Rejected
H6b (Consumer Attitudes)	Rejected
H6b (NWOM)	Rejected

Note <sup>a</sup> - H6a (Consumer Attitudes) could have been accepted at the 10% significance level,  $F(1, 394) = .3.75$   $p = .53$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .01$ .

## 4.4 Additional analyses

### 4.4.1 The effects of gender

While age and gender were found to be sufficiently randomised in the sample and were therefore not included as control variables in any of the analyses, the Pearson correlation matrix revealed some significant effects. Therefore, the relationship between gender and NWOM, perceived intrinsic and extrinsic motives are worth exploring, even if the results that follow should be interpreted with caution, as gender was shown to be sufficiently randomised throughout the experimental conditions. When examining the gender variable, it was found that 164 people were male (40.8%), 234 female (58.2%), 3 non-binary (0.7%) and 1 preferred not to say (0.2%). Since 99% of people indicated they identify as either male or female, and the non-binary and prefer not to say groups were too small for any meaningful analyses, they were excluded from the following tests.

To test for possible relationships between these variables a series of independent samples t-tests were conducted. The t-test revealed a significant difference between males ( $M = 2.55$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ) and females ( $M = 2.18$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ),  $t(396) = 3.06$ ,  $p = .002$ . The t-test revealed that men were significantly more likely to engage in NWOM ( $M = 2.55$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ) than women ( $M = 2.18$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ),  $t(396) = 3.06$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $M_{\text{difference}} = .37$ , 95% CI [.13, .61], Cohen's  $d = .31$ .

Next, the effect of gender on perceived intrinsic motives was investigated. The t-test revealed that men were significantly less likely to attribute intrinsic motives ( $M = 4.41$ ,  $SD = 1.25$ ) than women ( $M = 4.73$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ),  $t(396) = -2.54$ ,  $p = .011$ ,  $M_{\text{difference}} = -.321$ , 95% CI [-.57, -.07], Cohen's  $d = -.26$ .

Lastly, the relationship between gender and perceived extrinsic motives was investigated. The t-test revealed that men were significantly more likely to attribute extrinsic motives ( $M = 5.42$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ) than women ( $M = 5.06$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ),  $t(387,23) = 3.04$ ,  $p = .003$ ,  $M_{\text{difference}} = .356$ , 95% CI [.13, .59], Cohen's  $d = .30$ .

### 4.4.2 The effects of corporate-NGO partnership aspects on perceived motives

#### 4.4.2.1 Perceived intrinsic motives

To test the effect of each aspect of cross-sector CSR partnerships as well as their interaction effect on perceived intrinsic motives, a three-way ANOVA was employed. The test found that the effect of fit on perceived intrinsic motives was not significant,  $F(1, 394) = 0.95$ ,  $p = .330$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .00$ . No significant difference in low fit ( $M = 4.65$ ,  $SD = 1.30$ ) versus high fit ( $M = 4.53$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ) scenarios was observed. The test showed a significant positive effect of duration,  $F(1, 394) = 5.71$ ,  $p = .017$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .01$ . A significant difference between short ( $M = 4.44$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ ) and long duration ( $M = 4.73$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ) did exist showing that partnership duration is a significant predictor for

perceived intrinsic motives. CSR domain did not yield significant results,  $F(1, 394) = 0.28, p = .595$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .00$ , where no significant differences between environmental ( $M = 4.62, SD = 1.22$ ) and social ( $M = 4.55, SD = 1.28$ ) domains existed. All interaction effects were not found to be significant (all  $p$ 's  $> .059$ ).

#### 4.4.2.2 Perceived extrinsic motives

Conducting the same test with perceived extrinsic motives as the dependent variable showed that fit did not have a significant effect on perceived extrinsic motives,  $F(1, 394) = 0.11, p = .740$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .00$ . No significant difference in low fit ( $M = 5.19, SD = 1.21$ ) versus high fit ( $M = 5.23, SD = 1.20$ ) conditions was observed. Similar to the results for perceived intrinsic motives, the test showed a significant effect of duration,  $F(1, 394) = 4.19, p = .041$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .01$ . A significant difference between short ( $M = 5.33, SD = 1.15$ ) and long duration ( $M = 5.09, SD = 1.24$ ) did exist showing that partnership duration is a significant predictor for perceived extrinsic motives. CSR domain did not yield significant results,  $F(1, 394) = 0.82, p = .366$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .00$ , where no significant differences between environmental ( $M = 5.27, SD = 1.14$ ) and social ( $M = 5.15, SD = 1.26$ ) domains existed.

The three-way interaction effect between CSR fit, partnership duration and CSR domain was found to be significant,  $F(1, 394) = 4.45, p = .036$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .01$ . Specifically, perceived extrinsic motives were higher in the short duration, low fit and environmental scenarios ( $M = 5.55, SD = 0.88$ ) in comparison to scenarios with long duration, low fit, environmental scenarios ( $M = 5.06, SD = 1.23$ ),  $b = -0.49, p = .039$  CI95% = [-0.95, -0.02]. Moreover, perceived extrinsic motives were also higher in short duration, high fit, social scenarios existed ( $M = 5.49, SD = 1.10$ ), when compared to scenarios with long duration, high fit and social domain ( $M = 4.99, SD = 1.28$ ),  $b = -0.50, p = .036$  CI95% = [-0.98, -0.03].

These results demonstrate that for perceived extrinsic motives, the interaction among fit and domain is different across long and short partnership duration, where in short duration scenarios, participants were more likely to attribute extrinsic motives, compared to long duration scenarios.

## **5 Discussion and conclusion**

In today's business landscape CSR has become a "de facto law" for firms across industries (KPMG, 2011, p.2). Indeed, firms are facing an ever-increasing pressure from the public and regulators to be more sustainable and socially responsible (Torugsa et al., 2013, p.383), while balancing their legal obligation to create value for their shareholders. As such corporations have tried to create CSR strategies that are cost effective, while also contributing to the public good (Dartey-Baah & Amoako, 2021, p.417). Scholars have also tried to examine what characteristics of CSR initiatives work best in improving consumer outcomes (Schade et al., 2022, p.49; Vafeiadis et al., 2021, p.288; Zhou & Ki, 2017, p.81). This study sought to contribute to this research stream by focusing on how corporate-NGO partnerships are perceived by consumers. Specifically, it aimed to firstly, isolate the individual and combined effects of fit and domain, secondly, establish the role of partnership duration and thirdly, investigate how perceived company motives mediate the effects of these aspects on consumer outcomes. Furthermore, this thesis' focus on the oil and gas industry, also adds to previous literature on controversial industries.

### **5.1 Main findings**

#### **5.1.1 The interrelatedness of fit and domain**

This study set out to disentangle the effects of fit and domain, despite their very close relationship in the literature. Most of the literature about CSR fit does not see domain as a different concept but rather as a component of fit and this was observed in the results of the manipulation check questions (Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006, p.155). A significant effect for both fit and domain was observed on their respective manipulation checks, which attests to their close relationship. This aligns with the broad definition of fit that many sources employ. For example, the broad concept of fit, according to some authors, refers to "congruity derived from mission, products, markets, technologies, attributes, brand concepts, or any other key association" (Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006, p.155). Based on this definition, the interrelatedness between fit and domain could be anticipated. Nevertheless, only one interaction effect between fit and domain was present, concerning NWOM intentions.

When analysing the observed interaction between the two concepts, it was found that it did not have the expected direction, and instead showed that participants in low fit environment conditions were less likely to engage in NWOM than participants in high fit environment conditions. The same was not true for participants in social conditions, where no significant in NWOM intentions difference between low and high fit conditions was observed.

While the a variety of studies on CSR in controversial industries shows evidence that low fit CSR initiatives are better perceived by consumers (Austin & Gaither, 2019, p.16; Gaither & Austin, 2016, p.706; Kim & Choi, 2022, p.12; Song & Wen, 2020, p.891), no indications in the literature existed that maintained the notion that supporting environmental causes is the approach that leads to improved consumer outcomes. While this divergence may be explained by the differences in the chosen manipulations, as for example Austin and Gaither (2019, p.16) employed high fit scenarios, where the company's core business directly contradicts the CSR cause (Coca-Cola supporting an anti-obesity campaign), this thesis' findings nonetheless demonstrate how both fit and domain play a role in consumers' evaluation of CSR activities.

Drawing on previous findings that show that the level of elaborative thinking that consumers use, when processing new information, depends on the degree of CSR fit (as seen traditionally, where domain is a constituent part of fit instead of a separate concept) (Rifon et al., 2004, p.38; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006, p.165). As outlined previously in this thesis, in conventional industries a higher level of incongruence has been linked to negative consumer outcomes (Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006, p.164; Yoo & Lee, 2018, p.10). Yet, as low fit has been previously found to have a positive effect on consumer outcomes in controversial industry settings (Kim & Choi, 2022, p.12; Song & Wen, 2020, p.891), this paper hypothesised that in the oil and gas industry, the higher the degree of incongruity between firm and cause, the better the consumer outcomes. The observed interaction between fit and domain shows that this is not exactly the case and suggests that a certain level of incongruity is beneficial and firms in controversial industries ought to consider implementing CSR initiatives that are of the same domain as their core business, but of a low fit. It can be summarised that while none of the hypothesised effects of fit and domain were observed, the results provide an indication that both concepts are important components in how consumers perceive a given corporate-NGO partnership, and future research ought to investigate their interrelatedness.

### **5.1.2 The key role of partnership duration**

Partnership duration was found to be a significant indirect predictor for both NWOM and consumer outcomes through perceived motives. The results show that longer partnership duration increases the likelihood that consumers perceive an initiative as intrinsically motivated, thus improving consumer outcomes. On the other hand, when partnership duration is short, consumers tend to perceive said partnership as extrinsically motivated, which leads to decreased consumer attitudes. Moreover, partnership duration was the only aspect of corporate-NGO partnerships that



had a direct effect on both perceived intrinsic and extrinsic motives, which further highlights its pivotal role in how consumers understand such partnerships.

While previous studies have explored how other aspects of CSR initiatives affect consumers, partnership duration has been left as a somewhat neglected concept.

Previous studies that have investigated this concept have focused on conventional industries that do not face any particularly heightened public scrutiny (Wang & O'Connor, 2022, p.683; Waymer et al., 2022, p.270). As such this thesis contributes to extant literature by exploring how partnership duration affects consumers in a controversial industry setting.

### **5.1.3 Perceived motives**

This study highlighted the crucial role of perceived motives in how consumers evaluate corporate-NGO partnerships. There were strong correlations between consumer outcomes and perceived motives. Moreover, the mediation analyses revealed that a key factor in consumers' evaluation of CSR partnerships is whether they see such partnerships as intrinsically or extrinsically driven.

The oil and gas industry has traditionally been seen as engaging in CSR just as a way to appease stakeholders (Frynas, 2010, p.176), however, despite this inclination to perceive CSR actions of the industry as entirely extrinsically motivated, this study found that long partnership duration led to a significantly higher likelihood that consumers attribute a company's CSR actions as intrinsically motivated.

Indeed, the aspects of corporate-NGO partnerships had a significant effect on how consumers perceive them. When analysing how fit, domain and partnership duration affected perceived motives, it was found that in short duration, low fit and environmental scenarios participants were significantly more likely to attribute extrinsic motives than in long duration, low fit environmental scenarios. Furthermore, participants in conditions with long duration, high fit, social scenarios were less likely to view CSR initiatives as firm-serving in comparison to short duration, high fit, social scenarios. These results underscore the role of duration, but also highlight the intricate effects between fit, duration and domain. Whether this is specific to the oil and gas industry alone, to all controversial industries or whether it exists in all areas of business deserves future academic attention.

#### **5.1.4 The effect of gender**

While investigating the effects of gender on corporate-NGO partnerships was not the main aim of this research, certain interesting findings were uncovered. The key takeaway from these results is that men are significantly more likely to perceive corporate-NGO partnerships in a negative light. Men were measurably more likely to attribute CSR partnerships to extrinsic motives, as well as indicating they are more likely to engage in NWOM, in comparison to women. While some previous studies into the role of gender on CSR perceptions have observed a similar effect (Hur et al., 2016, p.354), others find that women hold higher expectations from companies regarding CSR and are therefore more critical (Calabrese et al., 2016, p.145). Whether these differences are industry specific or not is unknown. However, this paper will echo the sentiment by Hur et al., (2016, p.354) that businesses should consider incorporating segmentation into their CSR campaigns along gender lines.

#### **5.2 Theoretical implications**

This study has three main theoretical implications. Firstly, it contributes to extant research on corporate-NGO partnerships by highlighting the importance of partnership duration. The presence of significant mediating effects demonstrates that partnership duration is a key component in how consumers evaluate such partnerships. This is particularly poignant in the current CSR landscape, where companies are increasingly engaging with NGOs in order to create a more holistic CSR campaign that is perceived positively by all stakeholders (Waymer et al., 2022, p.258). This study's findings contradict those of Harrison et al., (2022, p.8), who found that short partnerships are better perceived by consumers as they signal that the CSR campaign is "more urgent, timely, and direct". This difference in findings can be explained by that study's focus on how corporate-NGO partnerships affect consumer attitudes towards the NGO, rather than towards the firm as in the current thesis. Instead, the results mimic those of Wang and O'Connor (2022, p.683) and experimentally show that a longer partnership duration leads to lower levels of NWOM intentions and more positive company attitudes. This study's findings also replicate the results of previous qualitative research that found that individuals highly value the longevity of CSR commitments, referring to it as the "ultimate test" as it represents a tangible evidence that a company engages in CSR not just to appease stakeholders, but due to a genuine concern (O'Connor et al., 2008, p.348).

Secondly, this thesis contributes to extant literature by strengthening attribution theory, through the provision of robust evidence for how perceived motives for engaging in CSR impact company attitudes and NWOM intentions. The findings of this study also support the assertions made by Ginder et al., (2021, p.358) that the choice of initiatives that a business supports play a

major role in consumers' motives attribution. Moreover, this research joins an existing body of literature that has found a significant mediating role of perceived motives in the CSR context (Bae, 2018, p.203; Ellen et al., 2006, p.154; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013, p.1836; Yoo & Lee, 2018, p.11). Furthermore, it contributes to extant research by providing support for attribution theory in the context of the emerging phenomenon of corporate-NGO partnerships. Additionally, the present research strengthens the theory by applying it to the oil and gas industry, which is the biggest contributor to the world's most pressing problem - climate change (Grasso, 2019, p.11; Poushter et al., 2022, p.3).

Thirdly, the study addresses the distinction between fit and domain in the context of corporate-NGO practices. While previous research has not delineated between the two, this paper attempted to split the concepts apart. In previous academic works, fit has been seen as an all-encompassing concept that includes domain as a mere aspect of it, while in this research their individual roles were investigated (Du et al., 2010, p.12). Due to the interrelatedness of fit and domain in the literature, an interaction effect between the two concepts was highly anticipated. Considering the oil and gas industry's status as a major polluter, CSR initiatives that do not target the negative externalities of the industry were expected to lead to more positive consumer outcomes as they can serve to redirect consumers' attention away from said externalities, therefore making them less salient. The experimental findings, however, show that oil and gas companies ought to focus their CSR efforts towards causes that are in the environmental domain, yet distanced from firm's core business.

Given this study's aim to isolate the effects of fit and domain from each other, it was unexpected to find no significant direct effect of neither on consumer outcomes. Fit has enjoyed a large amount of academic attention and has been seen as a determining factor in how stakeholders perceive and evaluate different CSR activities (Austin & Gaither, 2019, p.16; Gaither & Austin, 2016, p.706; Kim & Choi, 2022, p.12; Song & Wen, 2020, p.891). As such, according to extant research, a significant direct effect of fit was exceedingly likely to have been observed and the lack of it suggest that fit in and of itself is not as crucial of a factor as it was previously thought to be, but instead the intersection between fit and domain holds the key in understanding how consumers perceive a given CSR initiative. Yet, this study's results also hint towards consumers valuing the existence of a long-standing corporate-NGO partnership more than the nature of the cause said partnership is addressing.

### 5.3 Practical implications

This study's findings provide valuable insights that can inform and enhance practical applications for both CSR practitioners as well as NGO managers. Considering the increasingly necessary role of CSR as a tool for obtaining organisational legitimacy in controversial industries, corporate-NGO partnerships can significantly improve consumer outcomes (Yaziji & Doh, 2009, p.124). This study provides evidence that the aspects of a corporate-NGO partnership influence how consumers perceive the motives behind said partnership, which in turn affects consumer outcomes. Therefore, firms that want to improve their image through CSR should have a vested interest in how consumers perceive the company's motivations behind their CSR activities. When consumers attribute intrinsic motives to a particular CSR campaign a more positive attitude towards the company was observed, in addition to a reduction in negative word-of-mouth intentions. The opposite was true for perceived extrinsic motives. Additionally, firms in the energy sector that want to obtain and maintain a 'social licence to operate' should try to carefully manage how their CSR activities are perceived and aim to be seen as intrinsically motivated and acting in the interests of the public, instead of purely in the interest of their shareholders.

Furthermore, in order to attain more positive consumer outcomes, CSR practitioners should aim to establish long-lasting alliances with NGOs. Long partnerships signal the sustained commitment of organisations towards social responsibility, which has a significant positive impact on how consumers perceive a given firm. Additionally, long-term collaborations between firms and NGOs provide a clear signal to consumers that a company is genuinely invested in a cause and is motivated by internal drivers, rather than external pressure from stakeholders.

Partnership duration, however, is not the only aspect that needs careful attention from CSR managers. The firm-cause fit, and domain also showed to have an important interaction, which suggests that for oil and gas companies, corporate-NGO partnerships that address environmental problems, but are not directly related to a firm's core business yielded the most positive consumer outcomes. This implies that the CSR efforts of energy companies should aim to address their environmental externalities, while also not drawing attention to their negative environmental effects.

Overall, the present study gives new insights into the dynamics of consumer behaviour by demonstrating the pivotal role of CSR initiative selection in shaping consumer perceptions. Consequently, it provided more clarity on how consumers respond to different types of CSR implementation thereby aiding practitioners in the CSR formulation stage as described by Fatima and Elbanna (2023, p.113).

#### 5.4 Limitations and directions for future research

Several limitations to the current study need to be acknowledged. First, this research employed an experimental design, which aimed at making inferences about causal relationships (Babbie, 2017, p.251). Experimental designs are adept at capturing how different scenarios affect individuals' attitudes, however, lack the ability to understand an individual's reasoning behind their attitudes. Other approaches, such as interviews or mixed method designs can provide a deeper understanding into why certain attitudes are formed.

Next, the experimental manipulations devised for this study, portrayed CSR as a voluntary action taken by energy companies, which could have (subconsciously) signalled that firms in the industry undertake CSR actions exclusively out of their own volition. In reality, in many jurisdictions, oil and gas companies are required to be socially responsible by engaging in initiatives such as reducing carbon emissions, preventing oil spills, and participating in community engagement schemes, among others (Hassan et al., 2023, p.9; Paiva et al., 2023, p.506; Sam et al., 2024, p.4; Wanvik, 2016, p.521). Therefore, certain corporate-NGO partnerships presented in the manipulations might have been perceived as more intrinsically motivated than others, which could have impacted the results. Future research can explore this by devising experimental designs that compare how consumers perceive social alliances in the oil and gas sector when they are undertaken voluntarily versus due to mandatory regulations.

The third limitation of this study is regarding the use of fictitious organisations. While this was a deliberate choice, aimed at eliminating pre-existing biases, it also hinders the generalisability of the results. Many multinational oil and gas companies own retail operations, where consumers can interact with the brand on a daily basis and as such build a certain degree of loyalty. Additionally, NGOs also may often possess a strong and recognisable brand that influences how consumers perceive a corporate-NGO partnership. As already established, due to the controversial status of the oil and gas industry, most companies are perceived negatively, therefore the aim of CSR activities is to improve a company's reputation and gain legitimacy (Frynas, 2005, p.585; Lyra et al., 2017, p.136). Furthermore, as demonstrated by the findings of Vanhamme and Grobben (2009, p.280) the length of a company's CSR history is a vital component in the formation of consumer scepticism. As such eliminating consumers' previous associations poses some limitations to the generalisability of the results. Therefore, future studies may aim to replicate this study, but use an existing set of organisations, when devising the experiment.

Additionally, this thesis took a dualistic approach to perceived motives (i.e. intrinsic and extrinsic), whereas some researchers have used a more complex approach that distinguishes between four different types of perceived motives, namely egoistic-driven, values-driven, strategic-driven, stakeholder-driven (Ellen et al., 2006, p.155). While the framework proposed by Ellen et al.

(2006, p.155) has been used in the CSR literature (Jeon & An, 2019, p.10; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013, p. 1836; (Yu et al., 2020, p.17), the dualistic approach is also commonly seen (Bae, 2018, p.203; De Roeck & Delobbe, 2012, p.11; Kim et al., 2012, p.170; Romani et al., 2016, p.262). The rationale behind opting for the dualistic approach to motives, was based on the goal of minimising survey length as Galesic and Bosnjak (2009, p. 358) highlight the existence of a negative relationship between survey length and completion rate. While this was somewhat mitigated using a paid survey participant recruitment platform, a longer survey also entailed a larger financial burden. Future research can address this by employing the aforementioned framework developed by Ellen et al. (2006, p.155), which might lead to interesting and novel results. Specifically, considering the findings of Skarmeas and Leonidou, (2013, p.1836), it can be speculated that strategic-driven attributions will have neither a positive nor negative effect on consumer outcomes, given that consumers understand and tolerate strategic motives. Meanwhile, values-driven motives should have a positive effect on consumers' opinions as it is closely related with perceived intrinsic motives in this study. Finally, Skarmeas and Leonidou, (2013, p.1836) suggest that egoistic- and stakeholder-driven attributions impact consumer attitudes in a negative manner, similar to the findings of this thesis regarding perceived extrinsic motives.

Future research should also further examine the close relationship between fit and domain. The manipulation check for fit showed a significant effect for both fit and domain, as did the manipulation check for domain. This was somewhat expected as most scholars do not treat domain as separate construct, but instead as aspect of fit. This can be seen in the definition of fit that this thesis employed, where fit is referred to as the "perceived congruence between a social issue and the company's business" (Du et al., 2010, p.12). While this definition does integrate both fit and domain into one large concept, it fails to delineate between the two. Indeed, different scholars investigate fit differently, with some that focus on corporate-NGO partnerships differentiating between two types - functional fit (the relationship between a company's core business and a particular cause) and the image fit (the relationship between a company's and an NGO's brand) (Alcañiz et al., 2010, p.171). Furthermore, as previously discussed, Kim et al. (2012, p.165) divides fit into three different categories, namely business fit, activity fit, and familiarity fit. These differences in how fit is examined underscore how broad of a concept fit appears to be in the literature. As such, future research that investigates fit should take a close look at the different types and classifications of fit. Moreover, studies into corporate-NGO partnerships can compare the extent to which existing understanding of fit best describes consumers' perceptions.

Lastly, this research focused exclusively on the oil and gas industry. Future studies may aim to investigate how fit, domain and partnership duration influence consumer outcomes in other

(non)controversial industries. It may be especially interesting to study how fit and domain interact in sectors that are not subject to heightened scrutiny and compare these results to the present research.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

Corporate social responsibility has evolved into a pivotal component of the contemporary business environment, reflecting a paradigm shift in how companies perceive their role in society and how society perceives the role of businesses. The public has become increasingly demanding of corporations to be socially responsible and transparent, just as investors are also becoming more concerned about the sustainable practices of firms than the companies underlying financial performance (Shakil, 2021, p.1). Furthermore, regulators around the globe have begun implementing laws mandating that firms invest part of their profits into CSR initiatives (Gatti et al., 2019, p.10). These trends have pushed firms to increasingly adopt CSR as not just a tool for public relations, but as a vital component of modern business practices. While this is true across sectors, the oil and gas industry, with its enormous carbon footprint, has made it a major target of public and regulatory scrutiny (Grasso, 2019, p.11). To maintain legitimacy, the industry is increasingly embracing collaborating with NGOs, despite their historically adversarial relationship (Hussler & Payaud, 2018, p.115). These corporate-NGO partnerships aim to not only help a particular cause, but to also improve consumer outcomes for businesses. This study examined how three aspects of such cross-sector partnerships affect customer attitudes and negative word-of-mouth intentions.

Its findings underscore the important role of how consumers perceive the motives behind such partnerships as key factors in determining their success. Moreover, the length of corporate-NGO partnerships was found as a key determining factor in how consumers perceive them. Additionally, the interrelatedness of fit and domain was explored, which showed that to minimise NWOM intentions, firms in the oil and gas sector should prioritise engaging in social alliances focused on low fit, environmental issues such as wildlife preservation. Future research should further delve into how consumers perceive and evaluate corporate-NGO partnerships in order for a holistic understatement of the process behind consumer evaluation of such partnerships to be established.

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## Appendix 1

Dear respondent,

Thank you for your interest in this research. I am inviting you to fill in this questionnaire, where you will be shown a fragment of the multinational energy company Inerxo website, which I would like you to evaluate. The general topic of this study is regarding corporate social responsibility in the energy sector.

This questionnaire will take approximately 5 minutes to fill in. The questionnaire is anonymous and intended for research purposes only. There will be no third parties involved and the information will be stored securely. No personally identifiable information will be reported in any research product. You are under no obligation required to answer this questionnaire, and you are free to withdraw from study at any time without incurring any costs. Your willingness to participate along with accurate responses are highly appreciated. **There are no right or wrong answers.**

If you have questions about this research, in advance or afterwards, you can contact the responsible researcher via [668180pg@eur.nl](mailto:668180pg@eur.nl). This study is in accordance with the guidelines set out by the Ethics Committee of Erasmus University Rotterdam. If you want to invoke your rights or if you have a question concerning privacy about this study, you can contact Erasmus University's DPO (Data Protection Officer) at [fg@eur.nl](mailto:fg@eur.nl).

I consent to the processing of my answers for the purposes of this research study. I understand that such information will be treated as strictly confidential.

Yes, I consent

No, I do not consent



Appendix 1A. Consent form

What is your unique Prolific ID?



#### Appendix 1B. Prolific ID

Please have a close look at the images on the following two sections and then answer some questions about them on the upcoming pages.

**You will not be able to go back, so make sure you have a good look.**



#### Appendix 1C. Disclaimer

Imagine you read online about an energy company you had never heard of before and decided to go on their website to get acquainted with them.

When going on the company website you are greeted by the following message that provides an overview of Inerxo.



#### Appendix 1D. About us page



Afterwards you navigate your way to the company's social responsibility webpage where you see the following information about a partnership between Inerxo and the non-profit organisation GEO:

#### Appendix 1E. Static message appearing for all conditions

GEO (Global Empowerment Organisation) is dedicated to catalysing positive change worldwide. Through collaborative efforts and innovative initiatives, GEO works tirelessly to foster sustainable development and protect the environment.



Inerxo and GEO have collaborated to initiate a programme dedicated to promoting energy efficiency among local businesses and households.

For over 15 years, our partnership has made a tangible impact, offering strategic funding and guidance to support sustainable practices within communities.

#### Appendix 1F. High fit, Long duration, Environmental condition

GEO (Global Empowerment Organisation) is dedicated to catalysing positive change worldwide. Through collaborative efforts and innovative initiatives, GEO works tirelessly to empower communities and uplift individuals.



Inerxo and GEO have collaborated to initiate a programme dedicated to reducing human suffering by providing aid to people and communities affected by climate change induced natural disasters. For over 15 years, our partnership has made a tangible impact in delivering support and humanitarian assistance to those affected by such calamities.

#### Appendix 1G. High fit, Long duration, Social condition

GEO (Global Empowerment Organisation) is dedicated to catalysing positive change worldwide. Through collaborative efforts and innovative initiatives, GEO works tirelessly to foster sustainable development and protect the environment.



Inerxo and GEO have collaborated to initiate a programme dedicated to promoting energy efficiency among local businesses and households.

Since our partnership began 3 months ago, we have already made a tangible impact, offering strategic funding and guidance to support sustainable practices within communities.

#### Appendix 1H. High fit, short duration, environmental condition

GEO (Global Empowerment Organisation) is dedicated to catalysing positive change worldwide. Through collaborative efforts and innovative initiatives, GEO works tirelessly to empower communities and uplift individuals.



Inerxo and GEO have collaborated to initiate a programme dedicated to reducing human suffering by providing aid to people and communities affected by climate change induced natural disasters. Since our partnership began 3 months ago, we have already made a tangible impact in delivering support and humanitarian assistance to those affected by such calamities.

#### Appendix 1I. High fit, Short duration, Social condition



GEO (Global Empowerment Organisation) is dedicated to catalysing positive change worldwide. Through collaborative efforts and innovative initiatives, GEO works tirelessly to foster sustainable development and protect the environment.



Inerxo and GEO have collaborated to initiate a programme dedicated to the conservation of sea turtles and the protection of their vulnerable habitats.

For over 15 years, our partnership has made a tangible impact in safeguarding sea turtle habitats around the world.

#### Appendix 1J. Low fit, Long duration, Environmental condition

GEO (Global Empowerment Organisation) is dedicated to catalysing positive change worldwide. Through collaborative efforts and innovative initiatives, GEO works tirelessly to empower communities and uplift individuals.



Inerxo and GEO have collaborated to initiate a programme dedicated to combating pancreatic cancer and supporting affected people and their families.

For over 15 years, our partnership has made a tangible impact in providing vital resources and support to those battling pancreatic cancer.

#### Appendix 1K. Low fit, Long duration, Social condition



GEO (Global Empowerment Organisation) is dedicated to catalysing positive change worldwide. Through collaborative efforts and innovative initiatives, GEO works tirelessly to foster sustainable development and protect the environment.



Inerxo and GEO have collaborated to initiate a programme dedicated to the conservation of sea turtles and the protection of their vulnerable habitats.

Since our partnership began 3 months ago, we have already made a tangible impact in safeguarding sea turtle habitats around the world.

#### Appendix 1L. Low fit, Short duration, Environmental condition

GEO (Global Empowerment Organisation) is dedicated to catalysing positive change worldwide. Through collaborative efforts and innovative initiatives, GEO works tirelessly to empower communities and uplift individuals.



Inerxo and GEO have collaborated to initiate a programme dedicated to combating pancreatic cancer and supporting affected people and their families.

Since our partnership began 3 months ago, we have already made a tangible impact in providing vital resources and support to those battling pancreatic cancer.

#### Appendix 1M. Low fit, Short duration, Social condition

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements, in regards to the information that was presented to you.

The business domain of Inerxo matches with the business domain of the non-profit organisation.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Somewhat disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat agree

Agree

Strongly agree

Appendix 1N. Manipulation check question – fit

The duration of the partnership between Inerxo and its partner non-profit organisation is less than a year.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Somewhat disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat agree

Agree

Strongly agree



Appendix 10. Manipulation check question – partnership duration

How would you best describe the focus of the partnership between Inerxo and the non-profit, where environmental focus refers to protecting the environment and wildlife, while social refers to helping individuals and communities?

- Environmental focus
- Somewhat environmental focus
- Slight environmental focus
- Neither environmental nor social focus
- Slight social focus
- Somewhat social focus
- Social focus



#### Appendix 1P. Manipulation check question – domain

Please choose the answer that most reflects your attitude towards Inerxo.

- |                        |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                      |
|------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Negative               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Positive             |
| Dislike                | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Like                 |
| Unfavourable           | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Favourable           |
| Socially irresponsible | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Socially responsible |

#### Appendix 1Q. Consumer attitude scale

This question is an attention check. To show that you are paying attention to the questions, you must select 'Strongly disagree'.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Somewhat disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat agree

Agree

Strongly agree



#### Appendix 1R. Attention check 1

Please carefully and honestly indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about Inerxo's motivation to engage in this partnership.

I believe that Inerxo engages in a partnership with this non-profit organisation...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Primarily because Inerxo is genuinely concerned about this cause	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Primarily because Inerxo feels morally obligated to help this cause	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Primarily because Inerxo wants to give back something to society	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Primarily because Inerxo wants to do the right thing for society	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



## Appendix 1S. Intrinsic motives scale

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements about Inerxo's motivation to engage in social responsibility.

I believe that Inerxo engages in a partnership with this non-profit organisation....

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Primarily because its competitors are doing the same	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Primarily because it is trendy to do so nowadays	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Primarily because Inerxo wants to attract more customers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Primarily because Inerxo wants to improve its image among consumers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



## Appendix 1T. Extrinsic motives scale

**Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements.**

I intend to say negative things about Inerxo to friends, relatives or other people.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Somewhat disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat agree

Agree

Strongly agree

Appendix 1U. NWOM question 1

**Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements.**

I intend to say negative things about Inerxo to friends, relatives or other people.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Somewhat disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat agree

Agree

Strongly agree

Appendix 1V. NWOM question 2



I intend to discredit Inerxo with friends, relatives or other people.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Somewhat disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat agree

Agree

Strongly agree

This question is an attention check. To show that you are paying attention to the questions, you must select 'Neither agree nor disagree'.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Somewhat disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat agree

Agree

Strongly agree



Appendix 1W. NWOM question 3&4

Almost done! What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary / third gender
- Prefer not to say

What is your age?

Where are you from?

What is your highest level of education completed?

- Less than high school
- High School or equivalent
- Trade/Technical/Vocational training
- Bachelor's degree or equivalent
- Master's degree or equivalent
- Doctorate or professional degree (PhD)



Appendix 1X. Demographic questions

Thank you for participating in this survey. Your answers will be treated confidentially. If you have any questions regarding the survey or the research, please feel free to contact me via 668180pg@eur.nl

**Disclaimer:** All information about Inerxo and GEO that is presented in this study is entirely fictional and was created only for the purpose of this research.

Please click the right arrow, so that your response is recorded. This way you will also receive your Prolific completion code.



#### Appendix 1Y. Debrief

We thank you for your time spent taking this survey.

Your response has been recorded.

Your Prolific completion code is C8AV5D4D

#### Appendix 1Z. Final message of the questionnaire