Master Thesis CS

About the role of CSR communication as a determinant of consumer attitudes towards brands

Identification of CSR message features creating positive attitudes towards CSR messages and brands behind it

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Management Summary

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communication literature indicates that brands which communicate about CSR are subject to consumer skepticism, while also suggesting that CSR and CSR communication is able to foster positive consumer responses and purchase intentions. The more an organization is able to control CSR message contents, the less trustworthy it is evaluated by consumers according to the literature. This proposition is called the CSR communication dilemma (Morsing, 2003) as it implies that organizations and brands cannot communicate about their social efforts themselves without risking to be encountered with consumer skepticism which has been found to prevent actual and intended purchases.

In this research it is argued that concluding from consumer skepticism towards CSR messages to low purchase intentions as it is often handled in the academic literature is a too narrow conclusion. Researches on CSR advertisements give reason to believe that other consumer attitudes towards brands might also be of relevance in the effect of CSR messages on the consumer-brand relationship and purchase intentions. Therefore, current findings in the field of (CSR) communication have been reviewed for their relevance for this research while considering the guiding question:

To what extent do particular CSR message features influence positive consumer attitudes towards CSR messages and the brands behind these messages?

Based upon the literature study, four distinct CSR message features (CSR motives, CSR-brand fit, CSR message specificity and CSR target) have been selected and tested for their influence on two consumer attitudes towards CSR messages (skepticism and credibility) and on consumer attitudes towards brands (identification, commitment, trust and satisfaction). The CSR message features can be differentiated in extrinsic and intrinsic CSR motives, low and high CSR-brand fit, low and high CSR message specificity, and global and local CSR targets.

Deduced from earlier investigations it is hypothesized that intrinsic CSR motives, high CSR-brand fit, high CSR message specificity and local CSR targets have a more positive effect on credibility, brand identification, commitment, trust and satisfaction than the opposite CSR message particularity. It is also hypothesized that credibility (skepticism) influences brand identification, commitment, trust and satisfaction positively (negatively). All these attitudes, except for skepticism, are expected to impact purchase intentions positively.

These hypotheses have been tested by means of a cross-sectional 2 x 2 x 2 x 2 factorial experiment including five different CSR messages from real fast moving consumer goods' brand websites. Findings, obtained by a heterogeneous sample (n = 251) with a mean age of 26 years, reveal that perceptions of intrinsic CSR motives, a high CSR-brand fit, high CSR message specificity and local CSR targets influence credibility of CSR messages positively while reducing skepticism towards the same message, as it has been hypothesized. Also, the hypotheses regarding the positive

effect of the CSR message features intrinsic CSR motives, high CSR-brand fit, local CSR target and high CSR message specificity on positive consumer responses, namely brand identification, commitment, trust, and satisfaction could be accepted. According to this study, brand trust is negatively influenced by skepticism towards CSR messages. High Purchase intentions are best predicted by high CSR message specificity, high brand commitment, brand trust, and brand satisfaction, while being reduced by perceptions of extrinsic CSR motives. Brand identification and message credibility are significantly influenced by an interaction between CSR message specificity and CSR motives: high message specificity and intrinsic motives yield higher scores on brand identification and message credibility.

Combining the observed findings with previous findings leads to the conclusion that the research offers support for previous findings that name CSR motives, CSR-brand fit and CSR target as decisive factors for successful CSR communication as they appear to have direct effect on consumer attitudes. Yet, the research adds to these earlier findings that certain combination of CSR message features even have a stronger impact on those positive consumer attitudes and that for written CSR communication, message specificity is a key factor that should be considered carefully when formulating and publishing CSR messages that are accessible for a broad audience, for instance on brand websites.

Finally, it is suggested to consider the observed CSR message features that are connected to positive consumer attitudes when formulating CSR strategies and CSR communication, and to combine them with Morsing and Schultz's (2006) *stakeholder involvement strategy*. It is argued that brands can achieve best and most successful consumer-brand relationships from CSR communication that is based on a strategy that is developed in cooperation with consumers and which is communicated by means of messages that are also formulated conjointly while considering the investigated CSR message features.

The research at hand adds to the literature that company- or brand-created communication about CSR efforts might not be the source of consumer skepticism or low CSR message credibility as the CSR communication dilemma proposes. It is rather suggested that the adequate combination of relevant CSR message features (the ones tested here and probably some unobserved ones) has the potential to influence consumer attitudes towards CSR communication and brands positively. It is also argued that the common approach to test only one or two CSR message features for their effect on one or two consumer attitudes fails to capture the complex interaction of the multiple factors that are of relevance on the emotional context of CSR and consumer-brand relationships. It is therefore called for future investigations that extend the current research by adding further CSR message features and to test also for the effect of pre-established consumer attitudes on the evaluations of CSR message features.

Content

A. Preface

This master thesis is the final piece of work after six years of academic studies. This is one reason why this document is of special meaning for me. Yet, it is also special to me because it deals with a topic, Corporate Social Responsibility, which I did not only pick because I focused on it during my study at the University of Twente, but mainly because I concern myself with an ecological and sustainable lifestyle.

It was of personal interest to get a deeper understanding of consumers' attitudes towards CSR and CSR communication. Communication Studies, but also discussions with friends, co-workers and my family let me believe that adequate communication is the only means to get others to rethink their pre-established attitudes. As organizations and brands do not have the chance to constantly discuss with their target groups about their CSR it is essential that their lasting CSR messages, for instance on their websites, "hit the right tone". There is no doubt, that my prior and current internships influenced my interest in this matter, because they often demonstrated to me the difficulties of corporate or brand communication that is perceived as being relevant and trustworthy by consumers.

Having mentioned the personal relevance of this document, I need to confess how hard it was at times to come to this point. I would therefore like to thank all those supportive and motivating persons who helped me get through this last seven months. First of all, I want to thank my dear friends Sandy Huthmacher and Mareen Brüna who helped me at several stages with this work when I was lost in formulations and numbers. I would also like to thank my supervisors for their helpful feedback, flexibility and constant interest in my work. Finally, my special thanks go to my brother and my parents who are my biggest supports and cheerleaders, most honest critics, and just my home no matter how far away I choose to be.

B. Introduction – The Growing Presence of CSR and CSR Communication

In the last decade, the globalization of the world market made commercial borders permeable, creating an environment where consumers are constantly confronted with an extensive choice of products and services. Compared to earlier decades, organizations face an intensified competition to get through to consumers and to create long-lasting relationships with them for the sake of corporate viability. Price and quality are no longer the ultimate unique selling proposition of particular brand (Brønn & Vrioni, 2001), because producers are reaching equal abilities to produce for low costs while maintaining a certain quality. As a consequence, organizations use multiple ways to communicate their reason to be and the benefits of their products and services to prospects. Consumers are therefore confronted with numerous advertisements, marketing slogans, and claims why they should buy a certain product or brand instead of another.

At the same time, values have changed dramatically during the last years. On the one hand, consumers perception of what is important to them has changed as can be deduced from the German value index (*Werte-Index*, Wippermann & Krüger, 2012). In 2012, German consumers' Top 5 values are *freedom*, *family*, *health*, *community* ("Gemeinschaft") and *security* – compared to 2009 it is recognizable, that *success* lost the most in terms of its importance to consumers, while *community* has gained the most importance compared to other values.

On the other hand, organizations increasingly recognize and accept that their role within society has changed from a mere producer and seller to a responsible corporate citizen. This change is mirrored in the finding that 54% of German advertisers think that organizations and agencies have a share of the responsibility concerning sustainable consumption (Muuß, Conrad & Schobelt, 2011). This explains why 66% of organizations located in Germany are occupied with sustainability communication.

Yet, sustainability is only one part of corporate social responsibility (CSR), which has become a widely discussed topic among practitioners and researchers likewise. In this context, CSR is defined as organizations' or brands' behavioral guide and attitude towards social topics and relationships with internal and external stakeholders, and their entire environment (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010; Morsing & Schultz, 2006; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). CSR actions and manifestations are therefore directed at different shareholders (employees, customers, partners, etc.) and "go beyond the immediate, business-specific interests of the firm and its shareholders, as well as beyond that which is required by law" (Carmeli, Gilat & Waldman, p. 976, 2007). Thus, organizations and brands have countless ways to take a position on CSR and define the extent to which they get involved in it.

The increased commitment to CSR might be explained by research findings indicating that the public (i.e. consumers and prospects) is interested in the way how organizations affect their

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natural and social environment (Brønn & Vrioni, 2001; Carroll, 1991). Therefore, it is comprehensible that commercial entities responded to these findings by an increased engagement in CSR activities and programs. Their engagement in CSR is probably driven by the hope that their commitment to CSR and respect for consumers' values might be a selling argument in favor of their products and services compared to others.

Current examples of such efforts are campaigns like Coca Cola's engagement in the prevention of cardiovascular diseases[1] , or Melitta's engagement in the local community of interests IGS (Interessengemeinschaft Standort) [2] which promotes the community in which Melitta's headquarter is seated. Both organizations communicate their intent to support society in a matter which touches on current values: Coca Cola addresses the *health* value, while Melitta addresses the *community* value.

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[1] Coca-Cola light…[project description]. (n.d.). Retrieved from: http://www.hoeraufdeinherz.com/partner.html
[2] Melitta (n.d.). Unser Engagement [CSR description]. Retrieved from:
http://www.melitta.info/unser_engagement_de,322,1725.html

C. The CSR Communication Dilemma

Due to organizations' natural interest in monetary benefits from their actions, many studies tried to find evidence for an increased purchase behavior of consumers as a result of CSR and corporate responsible marketing (CRM). Yet, these findings are diverse, demonstrating a remarkable gap between purchase intent and actual purchase behavior as a result of CSR (Deng, 2012).

Based upon these findings it seems as if investigating the direct connection between CSR and consumers' purchase behavior is not delivering the aspired insights into the relevance of CSR for organizations. A closer look at the academic CSR literature rather suggests that profound research is needed to understand how CSR might influence consumers' general attitudes towards a brand or organization via communication, because "attitudes have causal priority over behaviors" (Lee, Shin, Park & Kwon, p. 61, 2010).

Positive attitudes, like brand trust and loyalty, are essential antecedents of more concrete responses such as purchase behavior (Dawkins, 2005; Perrini, Castaldo, Misani & Tencati, 2010), while negative attitudes towards CSR, for instance skepticism, might prevent purchases (Brønn & Vrioni, 2001; Deng, 2012). Du, Bhattacharya and Sen (2010) state that "[…] stakeholders often engage in more sophisticated attribution processes, and are capable of perceiving and reconciling mixed CSR motives." (p. 10). This means that simply engaging in CSR does not necessarily translate into positive consumer attitudes towards an organization or brand. Therefore it is essential to investigate when CSR actually does entail positive consumer responses, for example attitudes.

Communicating about CSR appears to be one approach to achieve positive attitudes towards a brand or an organization by increasing consumers' awareness for and information about organizations' CSR (Boulstridge & Carrigan, 2000; Choi, Eldomiaty & Kim, 2007; Pomering & Dolnicar, 2009; Sen, Bhattacharya & Korschun, 2006). To date, organizations perceive consumers to be not sufficiently informed about CSR to base their purchases on it (Muuß et al., 2011). Yet, it has been shown that consumers are also skeptical of CSR messages when they are transmitted by organizations (Muuß et al., 2011; Brønn & Vrioni, 2001; Du et al., 2010). This phenomenon is known as the *self-promoter's paradox* and hints at a decreased perceived legitimacy (Morsing, 2003; Morsing & Schultz, 2006), which is suggested to be avoided by minimal releases of CSR messages and CRM activities (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990).

The challenge is therefore to cope with the aforementioned CSR communication dilemma (Morsing, 2003): communicate CSR initiatives in a believable way in order to maintain consumers' perceived legitimacy as a responsible corporate citizen (Brønn & Vrioni, 2001; Duncan & Moriarty, 1998), without being accused of using CSR to *greenwash* and deceive consumers (Forehand & Grier, 2003; Parguel, Benoît –Moreau & Larceneux, 2011). This dilemma forms the basis for the research at hand. It is aspired to understand whether there are certain CSR communication cues that allow

organizations to communicate about and reap the fruits of their social engagement without jeopardizing consumers' perceived legitimacy. This translates into the generation of positive attitudes towards CSR communication on the one hand, and towards the organization or brand behind the CSR communication on the other hand. The purpose of this research is therefore to identify those features of CSR communication which create positive attitudes towards CSR messages and the brand behind these messages. Yet, "positive attitudes" is a very broad label for many distinct concepts, which requires being specified for a clear understanding of the concept and its role for this work. In the following section *Theoretical Framework* it is therefore defined what consumer attitudes actually are and which specific attitudes are of special interest for this research.

D. Theoretical Framework

Recent investigations report that CSR messages become more credible (i.e. trustworthy) the less controllable they are by the message-sending organization (Du et al., 2010). This implies that organizations have little chance to communicate about their CSR efforts in their own communication means, like corporate websites and advertisements. These communication instruments and channels are highly controllable by the organization and would, following Du et al.'s line of reasoning, barely be trusted by consumers. This proposition intensifies the aforementioned communication dilemma, calling for a solution that describes an effective way for organizations to communicate their CSR activities.

Obviously, Du et al. (2010) regard the communication channel to transport CSR messages and CSR marketing to have a strong influence on consumers' level of trust in the message. Nevertheless, they propose that for a better understanding of effective CSR communication, further investigations are needed to "explore cognitive (e.g. trustworthiness, CSR attributions) and affective (e.g. pride, empathy) responses that are unique to CSR communication" (p. 17). In this regard, it is important to stress that *unique* responses, have to be identified, which are of clear valence for CSR communication and to understand the CSR communication features that trigger those responses. The purpose is therefore not to find general antecedents of positive attitudes in consumer-organization relationships, but those who are of significant importance in the specific context of CSR communication which is fully steered by the organization.

Morsing (2003) already addresses the necessity of trustworthy CSR communication in order to build strong corporate reputations. Yet, she argues that consumers should not be the primary target of CSR communication due to the advanced communication style of sustainability reports, the weak effect of CSR communication on consumers' purchase behavior, and due to the assumption that CSR communication increases corporate vulnerability based upon the attraction of critics. Nevertheless, it is questionable whether the communication conflict with consumers can be ignored. Consumers (especially of the Western world) have become critical in terms of marketing and advertising and are eager to be informed about CSR (Dawkins, 2005). Hence, it is likely that consumers search for other than pure marketing cues to base their purchase behavior on. CSR might still be such a cue when being communicated adequately (Du et al., 2012; Wang, 2011). To date this *adequate* way could not be defined.

The academic literature on CSR provides a variety of attitudes towards CSR initiatives and CSR communication which need to be taken into consideration in this research context. Among them are negative attitudes like *skepticism* and *cynicism* (Brønn & Vrioni, 2001; Dawkins, 2005), or *resistance* and *questioning* (Deng, 2012); the neutral attitude *indifference* (Deng, 2012), as well as positive attitudes such as *praise*, *support* and *trust* (Deng, 2012; Lewis, 2003; Morsing, 2003;

Stanaland, Lwin & Murphy, 2011; Wang, 2011). Especially trust has gained a lot of attention in the academic literature as it has been identified to be an important antecedent of brand loyalty, organizational identification, increased purchase intention and behavior, for instance by Dawkins (2005) and Perrini, Castaldo, Misani and Tencati (2010). As mentioned before, the achievement of such outcomes are desirable for every brand, i.e. organization, for the sake of long-term viability and monetary benefits. However, it can be observed that there are no

a) quantitative studies testing particular CSR message features for their anteceding and mediating effect on consumers' attitudes towards CSR communication and their consequential effect on attitudes towards brands and/or organizations (*hereafter only referred to as* brands)

b) studies which differentiate between attitudes towards the CSR message and towards the brand behind the message

c) studies which include different brands which allows for a more differentiated evaluation of the CSR message feature effects on consumer attitudes

d) and there appear to be no studies on the effect of CSR communication features on consumer attitudes which have been executed in Germany and a research population other than students. Researches on the effects of CSR communication are primarily executed in Asian or American countries with students as the research population (for instance, Deng, 2012; Wang, 2011).

These gaps are supposed to be closed by the research at hand which is guided by the overarching question:

To what extent do particular CSR message features influence positive consumer attitudes towards CSR messages and the brands behind these messages?

Attitudes – A Definition of the Construct

From the research question it can be deduced that positive consumer attitudes are the dependent variables in this research context. The term "attitude" is used extensively throughout the academic literature. Perhaps, because attitudes towards a brand help to better understand the affective relationship between consumers and the brands they purchase and consume (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2002; Fullerton, 2005). According to Fullerton (2005) consumer attitudes towards brands "are the true drivers of behaviors (retention, positive word of mouth) that are the valued outcomes of a solid marketing relationship." (p. 107). For the sake of a clear understanding, it appears to be necessary to define this commonly used construct before relevant attitudes towards CSR messages and brands behind it can be selected for this research.

In the Oxford Dictionaries[3] *attitude* is defined as "a settled way of thinking or feeling about something". This leads to the assumption that an attitude is not a short-term opinion about something, but a more stable way to look at and feel about a given thing. Deduced from the definition of attitudes in the Oxford Dictionary, it can be argued that people have attitudes towards all the things, actions, events and conditions they encounter in their daily life. Ajzen (1991) argues that people's planned behavior depends on their attitudes, which are therefore predictors or antecedents of planned and actual behavior. How an attitude influences individuals' behavior depends on the strength of the attitude and on the personal evaluation of the attitude. This implies that not all attitudes are equally important for a subsequent behavior. The relevance of the valence of an attitude for consumers' planned and actual behavior is clearly expressed in Sherif and Hovland's Social Judgment Theory (SJT) (1961; as summarized by Dainton & Zelley, 2011).

According to this theory, people's attitudes towards a given topic can be assigned to either the *latitude of acceptance*, the *latitude of rejection*, or the *latitude of noncommitment*. In order to find CSR message features that make CSR communication more beneficial and successful for the sender (the brand behind the message), the latitudes of acceptance and rejection are the most relevant ones. These latitudes comprise topics which are highly significant to the addressed person, meaning that the person is ego-involved in the topic. Due to the individual's interest and involvement in the topic, the person has a distinct attitude towards it. Dainton and Zelley (2011) put SJT in a communication context and conclude that "messages that fall within the audience's latitude of acceptance will be viewed positively, and messages that fall within the audience's latitude of rejection will be viewed negatively" (p. 124). Based upon this conclusion, the authors declare that one needs to "consider the preexisting attitudes" (p. 125) towards a topic of those who receive a certain message before the message is created and send out to persuade the message receiver. Yet, this research aims at discovering which CSR message features fall within message receivers' latitude of acceptance being revealed by means of a positive attitude towards the message and brand. CSR message features that fall within the latitude of rejection or noncommitment would, according to the theory, not create positive, but rather negative attitudes towards the CSR message and the brand.

When talking about attitudes it is most often simply distinguished between *positive* and *negative* attitudes (for instance Mohr, Webb & Harris, 2001). As has been mentioned before, the purpose of this research is to discover which explicit attitudes towards a CSR message and the brand behind it can be created by means of certain CSR message features. Differentiating between positive and negative would not deliver satisfying results in this context. Therefore, it has been decided to test the effect of several CSR communication features on consumer attitudes which have been

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[3] Oxford University Press (2012). [Definition of the attitude]. Retrieved from:
http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/attitude

demonstrated to either result into or hinder brand advocacy, purchase intentions and actual purchases. These three (intended) behaviors can be regarded as advantageous factors in customer-organization relationships as they strengthen the bond between customers and companies or brands, ultimately resulting into financial benefits for organizations (Fullerton, 2005). To identify which CSR features strengthen or anticipate anteceding attitudes of these specific behaviors would actually help to improve organizations' overall performance.

Attitudes towards the CSR Messages

In the first instance, those attitudes have to be named which consumers develop when reading a CSR message and which are measurable after reading the message. Apart from that, for this research, attitudes towards the message need to be assigned to either the latitude of acceptance or rejection as described in the previous paragraphs as the latitude. Only message features which create attitudes that fall within the latitude of acceptance enable consumers to evaluate the message positively, which is clearly the aim of every brand engaging in and communicating about CSR. Two attitudes towards messages which are addressed frequently in the communication literature are *credibility* and *skepticism*. In the following paragraphs they are introduced as the consumer attitudes towards CSR messages of interest for this research.

Message Credibility. A message is regarded to be credible when the content appears to be believable, accurate, trustworthy, unbiased and complete in terms of relevant information (Flanagin & Metzger, 2007). Especially, the importance of the perception that a message is trustworthy has been stressed in several publications, for instance by Du et al. (2010) and Morsing (2003). They base the significance of trust and credibility on their impact on other consumer evaluations of brands and organizations such as a positive reputation.

Wathen and Burkell (2002) identified certain factors with an effect on online message credibility by means of a meta-analysis. They adduce that the credibility of a message depends on the "topic/content, internal validity/consistency, plausibility of arguments, supported by data or examples, framing (loss or gain), repetition/ familiarity, and ordering" (p. 136). Apart from internal consistency and a clear presentation, the authors also stress that the message receivers' predispositions regarding the message content might have a considerable effect on the perceived message credibility. This translates to consumers' latitudes of acceptance and rejection regarding a certain topic.

As mentioned in the introduction, consumers perceive (CSR) communication as being more credible the less controllable the content of the message is by the brand/organization that is addressed in the message (Du et al., 2010) – which feeds back to the described CSR communication dilemma. Messages which are published in the Internet face hurdles to be perceived as being

credible by the audience in particular. This is due to the perception that the content of web-based messages can easily be changed by and in favor of the organization behind the message (Flanagin & Metzger, 2000). Consequently, it is of importance to investigate which CSR message features have the potential to create message credibility among consumers even though the message originates from the organization and no independent source.

Skepticism. On the opposite side of credibility, *skepticism* towards a message can be placed. According to Boush, Friestad and Rose (1994) consumers' skepticism towards marketing messages in general stems from either doubts about the motives of the brand/organization behind the message or from difficulties to believe in the claims. Skepticism towards a message results from a cognitive evaluation of the message content, but also the context in which the message is situated. As mentioned before, a skepticism creating issue might be the publication of a CSR message on a brand's website. It is crucial to avoid skepticism as it leads to negative responses, such as resistance towards the messages (Deng, 2012; Mohr, Eroglu & Ellen, 1998). To use Kim and Lee's (2009) words "understanding what those [message] characteristics are and how advertisers can avoid unnecessarily undermining the credibility of their ad claims is critical" (p. 466).

If the research at hand identifies CSR message cues which are susceptible to consumer skepticism, this will help to avoid those cues which will in turn reduce negative responses to well intended messages. Previous investigations suggest that honest communication about organizations' intentions behind their CSR efforts and a comprehensive CSR strategy rather than a short term CSR activity help to reduce consumer skepticism (Deng, 2012; Pirsch, Gupta & Landreth Grau, 2007). Thus, CSR messages that convey honest intentions and a holistic CSR strategy probably decrease skepticism towards the messages as well.

Attitudes towards the Brands behind the CSR Messages

Resulting from an investigation of the literature about the causal relationship between consumer attitudes and the named (intended) actions - brand advocacy, purchase intentions and purchase behavior – four explicit attitudes have been selected to be considered in this research. The attitudes *identification*, *commitment*, *loyalty*, and *trust* shall be tested for their dependence on certain CSR message features. Yet, each of these attitudes is a complex construct of its own, requiring a definition of what they mean and comprise in the context of this research.

Identification. Ashforth and Mael (1989) describe organizational identification as the condition where an individual regards certain aspects of an organization as being self-defining. This means that a person who believes that there is an overlap between certain characteristics of an organization and the self-identity of the person, this person identifies with the organization.

Following Kim, Han and Park (2001), this condition is transferred to the consumer-brand context: Consumers who perceive an overlap between personal values and beliefs and the characteristics of a brand, they identify stronger with this brand compared to other brands (Gupta & Pirsch, 2006). Also, consumers' identification with brands originates from the desire "to express themselves and/or enhance themselves by selecting particular brands" (Kim et al., 2001, p. 196) and is influenced by the brand personality's perceived attractiveness and the degree to which it conveys self-expressive values. This identification process occurs on a cognitive level and is based on former, personal experiences with the organization or brand (Bhattacharya & Elsbach, 2002). However, consumer-brand identification does not equal consumer identification with the organization behind the brand, but is a separate attitude (Aaker, 1997). Brand identification being based upon consumers' cognition, makes this construct measurable by means of scales, which is a clear advantage for this research.

Maignan and Ferrell (2001) claim that research is needed which "evaluates whether positive evaluations of overall corporate citizenship give rise to bonds of identification between the firm and consumers" (p.469). The authors base this request for further investigations on Bhattacharya, Rao and Glynn's (1995) suggestion that organizations who engage in CSR "enable consumers to identify with what the organization represents" (p.46). CSR communication, as being part of the overall corporate marketing communication, is likely to play a key role in this context, as it informs consumers about and makes them aware of a brand's CSR efforts (Kim et al., 2001; Sen et al., 2006). As a consequence, consumers who are aware of brands' CSR have an additional point of contact with the brands which allows them to find potential congruence between their self-identity and the corporate/brand identity in CSR messages.

Kim, Han and Park's findings (2001) add another reason for including consumers' brand identification to this study, by demonstrating that brand identification directly effects positive word-of-mouth advocacy behavior and indirectly affects brand loyalty positively. Deduced from these prior works, it shall be investigated whether certain CSR message features are capable of making a positive contribution to consumers' identification with the brand behind a CSR message.

Brand Commitment. Many studies in the field of marketing relationships establish *commitment* as a fundamental construct which bonds consumers to organizations and brands (Fullerton, 2005; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In a commercial context, commitment is understood as an attitude describing customers' emotions regarding their relationship with a certain brand (Fullerton, 2005). It is a positive, favorable attitude which embodies consumers' constant desire to stay in a relationship with a given brand (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Moorman, Zaltman, & Deshpande, 1992; Morgan & Hunt 1994). In this regard, commitment is linked to brand identification, trust and especially to brand loyalty (Fullerton, 2005; Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

The relevance of commitment as an attitude of interest for the research at hand, is affirmed by Fullerton (2005) who demonstrates that affective commitment to a brand is strongly related to repurchase intention and advocacy behavior in favor of a brand. Perhaps even more important, Fullerton's work documents that brand commitment mediates the relationship between brand attitudes and related intentions, such as repurchase intentions.

The academic literature demonstrates that commitment to an organization or brand is comparable to affective brand loyalty (Lee et al., 2010). While actual brand loyalty includes repeated purchasing of a certain brand, commitment and affective loyalty describe the prior state in which the emotional connection between consumer and brand is at front stage.

Drawing upon Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB, 1991) it is necessary to create positive attitudinal bonds between consumers and brands before actual, behavioral brand loyalty can occur in terms of repeated purchases. The cognitive phase is based upon consumers' logical thoughts about a given brand, such as perceptions of brand facts (Back & Parks, 2003; Lee et al., 2010), for example the price of the brand's products. On an affective level, brand loyalty comprises consumers' irrational responses to the brand which are based upon emotions and moods (Back & Parks, 2003; Lee et al., 2010). Here, a clear position is taken in favor of or against the brand. It is this level of brand loyalty which is called commitment by other researchers, for instance Fullerton (2005). Certain CSR message features might trigger the emotional evaluation of and commitment to the (relationship with the) brand. In turn this might influence the conative level of brand loyalty which equals the core intention of TPB, namely the person's intent to act in line with its cognitive and affective attitude.

In this document, brand commitment is therefore defined as consumers' emotional evaluation of their relationship with a given brand which has the potential to turn into actual, repeat purchases (Back & Parks, 2003; Fullerton, 2005; Lee et al., 2010). This definition fits the author's research approach to first investigate to what extent attitudes towards a brand are affected by certain CSR message features and to test whether this ultimately influences consumers' purchase intention.

Brand Trust. In the above presented definition of brand commitment, the *trust* construct has already been mentioned. Trust in a brand is not only suggested to foster (brand) loyalty (Dawkins, 2005; Perrini et al., 2010; Singh, Iglesias & Batista-Foguet, 2012) which in turn appears to positively influence repeated purchases (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001), it is also evaluated as the probably most important influence on the consumer-brand relationship (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Delgado - Ballester, Munuera - Alemán & Yagüe - Guillén, 2003; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). It is therefore an additional consumer attitude towards brands behind CSR messages which should be included in the research at hand.

Borrowing from other disciplines concerning interpersonal relationships, Delgado - Ballester, Munuera - Alemán and Yagüe - Guillén (2003) developed a definition of the brand trust construct, which they describe as the "feeling of security held by the consumer in his/her interaction with the brand, that it is based on the perception that the brand is reliable and responsible for the interests and welfare of the consumer" (p. 11). This definition puts strong emphasis on a brand's responsibility for its consumers which suggests a high importance for brand trust in the CSR communication context. In addition to that, the authors stress that, just as for interpersonal trust, brand trust depends on perceived risk and confidence, which translates to the willingness to rely on a brand and its promises as indicated by other researchers (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). It needs to be mentioned that the earlier defined attitudes towards CSR messages, credibility and skepticism might be the equivalents correlating with brand trust.

Moreover, Delgado-Ballester et al. (2003) differentiate between a *motivational* and *technical* dimension of brand trust. The motivational part of trust stems from consumers irrational, not allocatable sense of trust in a brand, while technical brand trust is based upon known facts about the brand. CSR messages probably differ in the extent to which they foster one or both of these trust dimensions. This might depend on the presence of certain CSR message features.

Brand trust is considered to be the reason why consumers stay in a long-term relationship with a given brand or organization (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). According to Morgan and Hunt (1994), relevant mediators or antecedents of brand trust are shared values and communication, which stresses the importance of the trust construct for this research. Shared values are also the basis for identification as mentioned before, so that identification with and trust in a brand are expected to be linked to each other positively. Referring to Morgan and Hunt's suggestion that communication antecedes brand trust and to the earlier made assumption of the relationship between message credibility/skepticism and brand trust, this research aspires to find out whether certain CSR message features communication are able to influence consumers' trust in a brand. Identifying such concrete message features would compliment prior research findings.

Finally, it needs to be stated that brand trust is especially important for the experience and credence attributes of products, services and brands, because customers cannot evaluate the full value or quality of the goods prior to the purchase and during the use/ consumption of these goods (Castaldo, Perrini, Misani & Tencati, 2009; Pivato, Misani & Tencati, 2008; Wansink, Van Ittersum, & Painter, 2004). Credence attributes such as sustainability or CSR, cannot directly be experienced by the consumer prior, during or after purchasing a particular brand and they often require experts and/or empirical data to be detected and defined (Wansink et al., 2004). Organic and fair trade products, for instance, imply the attribute of corporations' responsible behavior in terms of business ethics, production of ingredients, payment conditions, etc. to some degree. Yet, consumers have to

trust in the brand's actual performance according to these promises because they are hardly controllable.

Other brands whose core business is not based on credence attributes as it is the case for organic and fair trade brands, hold experience attributes: conventionally products cosmetics and toiletries for example, promise to make your skin firmer, cleaner and healthier which cannot be evaluated before the actual consumption of the product or service. Both, credence and experience attributes, are consequently expected to influence motivational and technical brand trust. Consumers will hardly buy a brand which they do not trust to be willing and to be able to perform what the experience and credence attributes promise. It appears to be worthwhile to include both, products which include credence and/or experience attributes, in the research, to find out in how far CSR communication features can influence brand trust.

Brand Satisfaction. So far, three consumer attitudes towards brands have been introduced and defined which appear to be connected with each other: in prior studies it is suggested that identification potentially antecedes trust, while trust antecedes loyalty which in turn fosters (re)purchase intention. Yet, another attitude is frequently included in investigations within the field of consumer attitudes toward and relations with brands: *brand satisfaction* has shown to mediate the extent of some of the earlier introduced attitudes.

Brand satisfaction results from consumers' individual evaluation of the brand's performance. In this regard, performance comprises the extent to which the brand "meets or exceeds the expectations" of the consumer after being used (Bloemer & Kasper, 1995, p. 314; and also Fullerton, 2005). Bloemer and Kasper (1995) found that customers whose satisfaction results from an elaborated evaluation process (*manifest satisfaction*) were more likely to show brand loyalty and commitment, than those customers who evaluated their degree of brand satisfaction only superficially. Thus, those customers who are certain that no other brand could have satisfied them more than the one they have picked, are more committed to a brand than those customers who are only satisfied because the chosen brand fulfilled its purpose. These findings are supported by Fullerton's (2005) investigations as they indicate that brand satisfaction and loyalty need to be experienced by consumers conjointly to make consumers (re)purchase a brand.

Raithel, Sarstedt, Scharf and Schwaiger (2012) reviewed the academic literature for the meaning and value of customer satisfaction for brands and organizations. They came to the conclusion, that customer satisfaction mediates organizational financial performances by "trigger[ing] positive customer outcomes such as customer loyalty, customer retention, cross-buying activity, price tolerance, word of mouth, and recommendation behavior […]" (p. 512). Also, satisfaction with brands and organizations reduces the probability of negative consumer reactions, attitudes and actions (Luo & Homburg, 2007).

Finally, it needs to be mentioned that brand knowledge is a precondition for the achievement of all previously introduced attitudes towards brands (Bloemer & Kasper, 1995; Fullerton, 2005) as these attitudes are mainly based on (evaluation) processes which cannot be performed for unknown brands. This leads to two preconditions for the research at hand:

a) consumer attitudes can only be tested for actually existing brands eliminating the option to use artificially created brands, and

b) brand knowledge is required for participation in the research.

Features of CSR Messages and Hypotheses

After having defined five distinct consumer attitudes towards a brand and two attitudes towards CSR messages which are worth to be influenced by commercial entities, it is necessary to select those CSR message features which shall be tested for their potential influence on the defined consumer attitudes.

Reviewing the CSR literature reveals that there are multiple ways to construct a CSR message. Brands' differing foci on CSR, brands' general approach to CSR and brands' business sectors allow for many different ways of CSR message compositions. Therefore, a close look at those CSR message features which appear to have the highest potential to affect consumer attitudes towards CSR messages and the brands behind it needs to be taken. The decision which message features are included in the research was based upon specific criteria.

First, this research aims at identifying those CSR message features that create positive consumer attitudes (identification, commitment, trust and satisfaction) towards a brand which can be influenced by the brands themselves and which are measurable.

Second, for this research it needs to be possible to clearly differentiate between the presence and absence of the CSR message feature. Otherwise, an effect on consumer attitudes could not be measured. This does also include that the absence of a certain message feature might be compensated by the presence of an opposing feature. For example, either a CSR message is about a local or about a global initiative.

Third, prior researches should indicate that the message feature is recognized by consumers and potentially capable of influencing their attitudes towards brands.

Four distinct CSR message features have been selected to be tested for their influence on consumer attitudes. These message features are *CSR Motive*, *CSR-brand Fit*, *CSR Target*, and *CSR Message Specificity*. It needs to be stated that prior works mainly test consumer responses towards CSR advertisements (for instance, Wang, 2011); fewer looked at the CSR messages on corporate or brand websites (for instance, Parguel et al., 2011). Yet, studies which investigated CSR advertisements are regarded as a valuable source and bench mark for the research at hand, as they

are also a communication means that is developed by organizations themselves and directed at consumers.

The selected features of CSR communication shall be explained in more detail to understand the full scope of their potential influence on consumer attitudes towards CSR messages and ultimately on consumer attitudes towards the brand behind the CSR message.

CSR Motive. Brands and organizations differ in terms of the extent of their involvement in CSR. CSR communication offers the opportunity to express the extent of involvement in CSR. Brands which engage in *institutionalized CSR programs* (Pirsch et al., 2007) are long-term committed to CSR and do not limit their commitment to only one social cause. Their intent is to build their business practices and behavior around and upon their CSR believes. CSR can be regarded as one of the core values of such brands and organizations.

Other brands choose to participate in *promotional CRM activities*. Pirsch et al. (2007) chose to name this approach promotional CSR, because it is time constrained and focuses on only one of the many stakeholder groups a brand has – prospects and customers. Such CSR intentions are mainly resulting from brands' (i.e. organizations) believes that today's consumers' positive attitude towards CSR can be a means to increase sales by engaging in short-term social campaigns. Other researchers refer to this approach as *extrinsic motives* (Deng, 2012; Du et al., 2010; Forehand & Grier, 2003; Sen et al., 2006). This construct means that a brand's or organization's CSR effort is based upon primarily monetary benefits rather than moral conviction. An example of such an approach is Pampers' annual "1 package = 1 vaccine"[4] campaign. When buying one package of pampers, buyers support a cooperation of Proctor & Gamble (the organization behind the Pampers brand) and UNICEF: Newborns in developing countries are provided with a tetanus vaccine.

Du et al. (2010) and Forehand and Grier (2003) observed that consumers accept extrinsic motives only to a certain degree, which is probably related to consumers trust towards the brand. Thus, it appears to be reasonable to test promotional activities / extrinsic motives for their effect on consumer attitudes, and especially on trust.

On the opposite side of promotional CSR efforts and extrinsic motives, Pirsch et al. (2007) place institutionalized CSR programs, or intrinsic motives (Deng, 2012; Du et al., 2010; Forehand & Grier, 2003; Parguel et al., 2011; Sen et al., 2006). These programs have the potential to create trust and positive attitudes towards a firm by "providing a comprehensive approach to CSR, attempting to fulfill a company's social obligations across all the stakeholder groups, and touching all aspects of the company" (Pirsch et al., 2007, p. 126). Intrinsic motives stem from the deep conviction that the brand or organization is obliged to act and behave socially responsible without being driven by the

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[4] United States Fund for UNICEF (2012). Procter & Gamble [Description of the cooperation]. Retrieved from: http://www.unicefusa.org/partners/corporate/procter-gamble.html

potentially positive monetary effect. For CSR communication this would mean that messages need to touch on the fact that CSR initiatives have their basis in the roots of the brand identity, addressing all stakeholders, and are long-term oriented instead of short-term promotional campaigns. Such CSR messages need to convey the holistic, long-term aspect and honest interest in CSR of the brand behind the message. Yet, some researches demonstrate that promotional CRM is also capable of creating positive consumer responses, when the organization or brand behind the promotional CSR activity communicates openly about it (Barone, Miyazaki & Taylor, 2000; Forehand & Grier, 2003).

Such researches often make the positive effect of promotional CSR dependent on consumers' perceptions regarding the motives behind the activity. Consumers differentiate between primarily intrinsic versus primarily extrinsic motives of a brand or organization to engage in CSR. It is therefore argued that messages which succeed in conveying a brand's holistic approach to CSR influence consumer attitudes towards the CSR message and the brand more positively than CSR messages which transport a primarily promotional approach to CSR.

> **H1a**: Credibility of CSR messages featuring *intrinsic motives* is higher than credibility of CSR message conveying *extrinsic motives*.
>
> **H1b**: Skepticism towards CSR messages which convey *intrinsic motives* is lower than skepticism towards CSR messages which are perceived as portraying *extrinsic motives*.
>
> **H2a-d**: CSR messages which communicate holistic CSR programs based upon *intrinsic* motives influence a) brand identification b) brand commitment c) brand trust and d) brand satisfaction with the brand behind the CSR message more positively than extrinsic CSR messages.

CSR-Brand Fit. Apart from the extent to which organizations and brand build their identity around CSR, it can also be differentiated between the extents to which CSR initiatives fit the core business of brands. There are brands and organizations which engage in high-fit CSR initiatives like the fashion chain H&M which supports the improvement of working conditions and wages of their Bangladeshi suppliers[5]. Another example is the water brands Evian and Volvic creation of a recycling loop, meaning that they recycle the majority of their own PET bottles locally to reduce the carbon footprint created by plastic bottles[6]. These CSR initiatives are clearly connected with the brands' core business, selling clothes and bottled water, and are therefore examples of a high CSR-brand fit.

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[5] Towards higher wages in Bangladesh. (n.d.). [Description of H&M social engagement]. Retrieved from: http://about.hm.com/content/hm/AboutSection/en/About/Sustainability/Reporting-and-Resources/Case-Studies/Wages-Bangladesh.html

[6] Dunstans Publishing (n.d.). Volvic & Evian close the recycling loop [Article]. Retrieved from: http://www.csrnewseurope.com/article/68

Researches indicate that such a high CSR-brand fit entails positive consumer attitudes towards brands (Becker-Olsen & Hill, 2005; Stanaland et al., 2011; Torelli, Monga & Kaikati, 2012), making this facet of CSR relevant for the research at hand. Communicating high CSR-brand fit initiatives in CSR messages is therefore expected to positively influence consumer attitudes towards both, the CSR message itself and the message-sending brand.

Torelli, Monga and Kaikati (2012) support the assumption that a high fit in this context might be a relevant feature in CSR communication for the creation of positive attitudes towards a brand. Their researches go even a step further, implicating that brand concepts which are based on openness and conservation allow for positive attitudes towards brands' CSR initiatives. According to them, self-enhancement brand concepts (luxury brands, such as Mercedes or Rolex) are perceived as being incompatible with CSR in general. In such a case, high CSR-brand fit between the initiatives and the core business would not be able create positive consumer attitudes.

The opposite of high CSR-brand fit is a low fit between the CSR initiative supported by a brand and the core business of the brand. An example of such an approach to CSR is the initiative of Coca Cola as a partner against cardiovascular diseases as mentioned in the introduction of this document. The majority of the CSR literature, which touches on this CSR aspect, indicates that low CSR-brand fit rather increases skepticism towards the motives of the brand behind CSR initiatives (for instance, Becker-Olsen & Hill, 2005), while high CSR-brand fit between the initiative and brand lead to more positive consumer attitudes, especially when consumers are brand conscious (Gupta & Pirsch, 2006; Nan & Heo, 2007).

However, Bhattacharya and Sen (2004) constrain the positive relationship between high CSR-brand fit and positive consumer attitudes, as their research indicates that consumers distrust high CSR-brand fit when conducted by companies' with a bad reputation. They name the example of an American tobacco brand engaging in a campaign against smoking children. People did not feel positive about this CSR campaign. Apparently, high fit does also include that the CSR initiative and the core-business must form a believable entity.

Additionally, Becker-Olsen and Hill (2005) found that high CSR-brand fit can improve consumer attitudes when the motives of the brand are perceived as proactive and not profit-oriented. This finding equals a combination of CSR motive and CSR fit, leading to the assumption of an interaction effect between these two CSR message features.

H3a: Credibility of CSR messages featuring *high CSR-brand fit* initiatives is higher than credibility of CSR messages featuring *low CSR-brand fit.*

H3b: Skepticism towards CSR messages featuring *high CSR-brand fit* initiatives is lower than skepticism towards CSR messages featuring *low CSR-brand fit initiatives*.

H4a-d: CSR messages featuring low CSR-brand fit initiatives have a less positive effect on consumers' a) brand identification b) brand commitment c) brand trust and d) brand satisfaction with the brand behind them than CSR messages featuring high CSR-brand fit initiatives.

CSR Target. Another frequently discussed aspect of CSR, which might impact consumers' reactions towards the engaging brands, is the proximity of those who benefit from the CSR initiative. Within the CSR literature it is differentiated between local, national and global CSR initiatives (Carroll, 2004; Snider, Hill & Martin, 2003). Local CSR comprises engagements which focus on communities which are close to the company's/brand's headquarters or country of origin. Nationwide CSR focuses on topics which are of national interest such as supporting a national sport or natural disaster, like American organizations' support for victims of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 (Snider et al., 2003). Global CSR efforts touch on more universal topics like emission control for the sake of the atmosphere and climate.

An example of a local CSR effort is the cooperation between a local children protection agency and the German coffee brand Melitta[7]. A global CSR initiative would be Kraft Food's general cooperation with the Rain Forest Alliance[8], which is definitely far away from most of Kraft Food's customers and touches on the global, nation-comprehensive aim to save the rain forest.

Carroll (2004) proposes that a common ground needs to be defined for global business ethics in order to make global CSR successful. In this regard, he proposes that international brands should engage in global CSR initiatives which address topics which are relevant to the global stakeholder group. Other studies rather lead to the assumption that consumers respond more positively to CSR activities which directly influence them or their proximate community (Boulstridge & Carrigan, 2000). This is more likely to happen in the case of local/national CSR. Torres, Bijmolt, Tribó and Verhoef (2012) support this assumption, because their investigations discovered clear brand equity advantages for companies who adapted their global CSR strategies to local communities and specific stakeholder needs.

Therefore, it is hypothesized that CSR messages which feature local/national CSR efforts have a more positive effect on consumer attitudes than CSR messages with a broader, less intimate, but rather global CSR target.

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[7] Melitta (n.d.). Unser Engagement – Soziales [CSR description]. Retrieved from:
http://www.melitta.info/unser_engagement_de,322,1724.html
[8] Kraft Foods Deutschland (2012). Wir übernehmen Verantwortung [Description of the social engagement]. Retrieved from: http://www.jacobsprofessional.de/jacobsprofessional/page?siteid=jacobsprofessional-prd&locale=dede1&PagecRef=586

H5a: Credibility of CSR messages which communicate *local CSR initiatives* is higher

than credibility of CSR messages communicating *global CSR initiatives*.

H5b: Skepticism towards CSR messages which communicate *local CSR initiatives* is

lower than skepticism towards CSR messages communicating *global CSR initiatives*.

H6a-d: Communicating *local CSR initiatives* influences consumers' a) brand

identification b) brand commitment c) brand trust and d) brand satisfaction with the

brands behind the CSR messages more positively than *global CSR initiatives*.

CSR Message Specificity. Kim and Lee (2009) differentiate in their research between objective and

subjective reporting. In their terminology, objective reporting implies that CSR messages about CSR

initiatives are written in an explicit, accurate and precise way. For example, donation sizes are named

in detail while keeping the tone neutral: *Brand XY donates 15,000 Euros to the XX foundation*.

Objective claims and messages are fact-based and therefore verifiable. In subjective reporting, the

example phrase would rather be paraphrased in order to make it more personal and subjective: *We

at brand XY always donate a substantial amount of our sales to the XX foundation* (Olsen, Pracejus &

Brown, 2003). Yet, such messages are vaguer and leave more space for personal interpretations.

Snider, Hill and Martin's (2003) content analysis of CSR messages in corporate websites

indicates that all CSR messages include a general (subjective) statement, but are mainly accompanied

by "specific reports of accomplishments" (p.183), which is an objective, explicit way to report CSR. It

is suggested that the differentiation between high and low levels of verifiable specificity in CSR

reporting is relevant for this research because it has been found that objectivity and accuracy

increase credibility of a message source, while subjectivity and low accuracy increase skepticism

among consumers (Darely & Smith, 1993; Kim & Lee, 2009).

In this regard, it is expected that identification, commitment, trust and satisfaction are more

likely to result from CSR messages which are written in an objective, detailed, accurate manner. As

specificity in this context includes a high extent of details, this reporting style appears to counteract

consumer skepticism.

H7a: Credibility of CSR messages which are perceived as being *high in specificity* is

higher than the credibility of CSR message which are perceived as being *low in

specificity*.

H7b: Skepticism towards CSR messages is lower for messages which are perceived as

being *high in specificity* than for CSR message which are perceived as being *low in

specificity*.

Credibility is clearly a positive attribute which brands should aspire if they want to be taken seriously by consumers. The concept of credibility is often used as a synonym for trust (Peters, Covello & McCallum, 1997) which has been presented as one of the consumer attitudes of interest for this research concept. Thus, the effect of CSR message *specificity* shall also be tested for its effect on trust and the other positive consumer attitudes towards brands behind CSR messages.

H8a-d: CSR messages which are *high in specificity* influence a) brand identification b) brand commitment c) brand trust and d) brand satisfaction with the brand behind the CSR message more positively than CSR messages which are *low in specificity*.

Finally, it is proposed to have a closer look at the relationship between consumer attitudes towards the CSR message and those consumer attitudes towards the brand behind the CSR message. The meta-analysis of researches on the relationship between ad attitudes and its outcomes by Brown and Stayman (1992) reasons the necessity to recognize this relationship. By comparing the outcomes of 47 researches they found support for the assumption that attitudes toward an ad have a significant effect on attitudes toward a brand (mediated by brand cognition). Fullerton (2005) and Keller (2003) support the suggested relevance of brand cognition/knowledge for the valence of consumer attitudes towards brands and their marketing activities such as CSR communication. These findings are taken as a relevant input for the research at hand, because advertisements are regarded as comparable to CSR messages as both are formulated by brands and are addressed at consumers. Thus, it is hypothesized that:

H9a-d: CSR message credibility influences consumers' a) brand identification b) brand commitment c) brand trust and d) brand satisfaction with the brand behind the CSR message positively.

H10a-d: Skepticism towards a CSR message influences a) brand identification b) brand commitment c) brand trust and d) brand satisfaction with the brand behind the CSR message negatively.

Ultimately, commercial organizations need to sell their products and services to survive in the business world. It has been stated in the introduction of this document that researchers tried to find a direct connection between CSR and purchases or purchase intention (Deng, 2012). Here, the argumentation is that first of all, the effect of CSR messages – which are the embodiment of the communication between brands and consumers – on consumer attitudes need to be specified, before the effect of purchase intentions is considered. The academic literature stresses that several consumer attitudes under study have an impact on or antecede purchase intention and actual

purchases (Dawkins, 2005; Lee et al., 2010; Perrini et al., 2010). After having defined which CSR messages features are expected to affect certain consumer attitudes towards CSR messages and brands behind them, it is appropriate to take this next step and have a look at the effect on consumers' purchase intentions. As a result from the prior hypotheses, it is hypothesized that:

H11a: CSR messages which are perceived as conveying intrinsic CSR motives influence purchase intentions via positive consumer attitudes towards the message and the brand behind it more positively than those conveying extrinsic CSR motives.

H11b: CSR messages which are perceived as conveying high CSR-brand fit influence purchase intentions via positive consumer attitudes towards the message and the brand behind it more positively than those perceived as conveying a low CSR-brand fit.

H11c: CSR messages which are perceived as addressing local CSR targets influence purchase intentions via positive consumer attitudes towards the message and the brand behind it more positively than those perceived as addressing global CSR motives.

H11d: CSR messages which are perceived as being high in specificity influence purchase intentions via positive consumer attitudes towards the message and the brand behind it more positively than those perceived as being low in specificity.

The proposed relationships between CSR message features, consumer attitudes towards CSR messages and brands are visualized in Figure 1 and Figure 2. Figure 1 covers H1a to H8d, while Figure 2 represents H9a to H11d.

Figure 1. Theoretical Model. The hypothesized Effects of CSR Message Features on Attitudes towards CSR Messages and Attitudes towards the Brand behind the Messages (H1a-H8d)
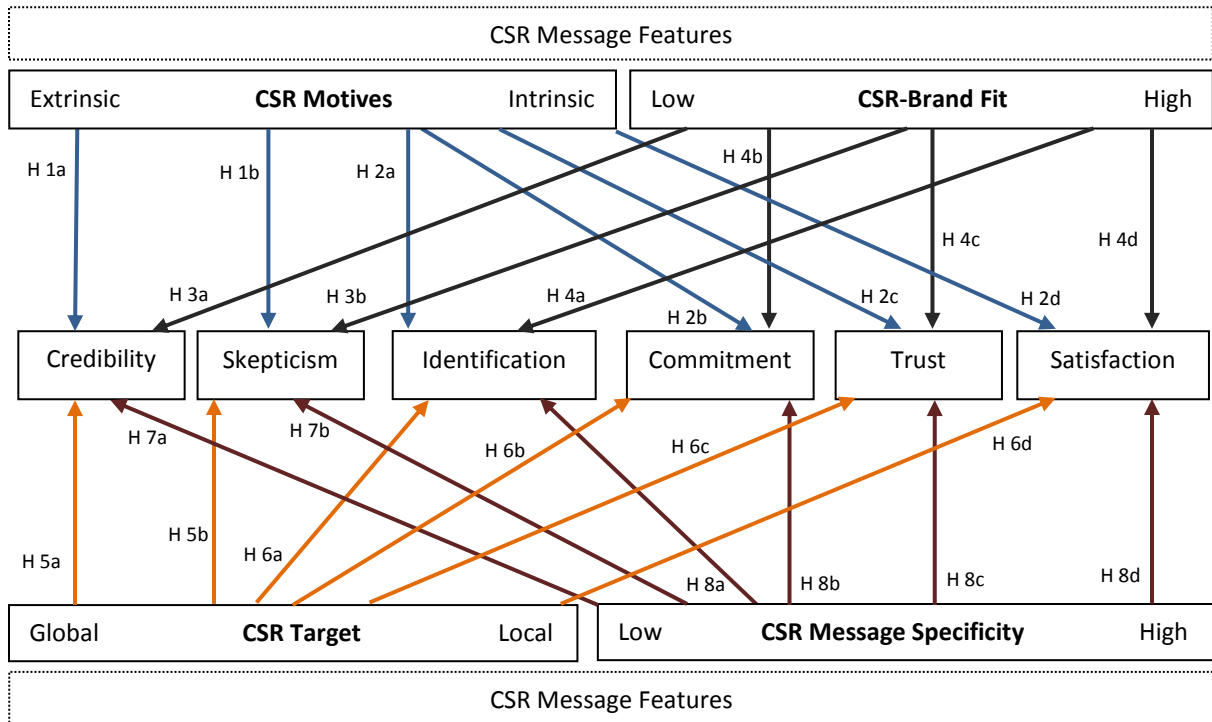
Figure 2. Theoretical Model. The hypothesized Effects of Attitudes towards CSR Messages on Attitudes towards the Brand behind the Messages (H9a – H11d)
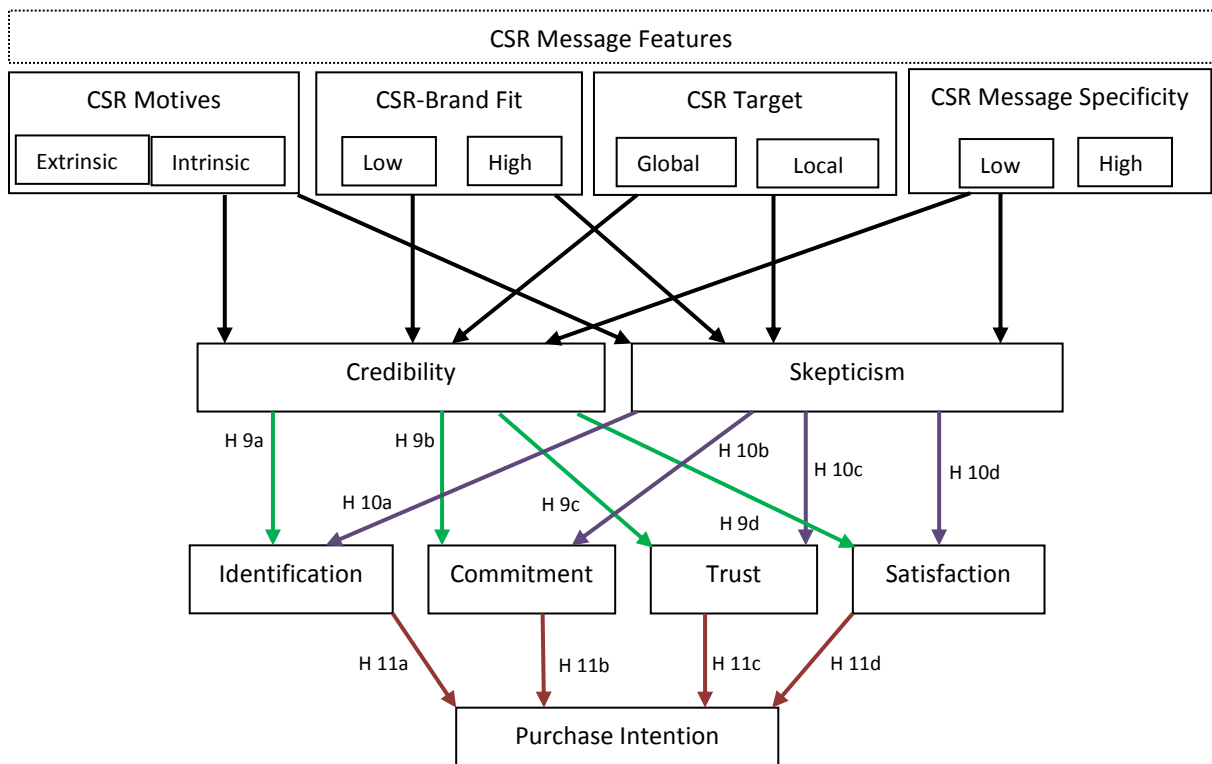
CSR Messages on Corporate Websites

Organizations have many means to communicate CSR messages to consumers. To gain specific insight into CSR communication cues and characteristics with a positive influence on consumers' attitudes towards a brand, it appears to be necessary to concentrate on a single communication instrument.

The communication literature of the last decades stresses the ever increasing importance of the Internet as one of today's most important communication media. Specifically, many researchers highlight that corporate and brand websites have a lot of potential to become a key communication means in the conversation process between organizations, brands and consumers (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004; Capriotti & Moreno, 2007; Morsing & Schultz, 2006).

Most major organizations use their websites to address their CSR in some form and to highly differing extents (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004; Parguel et al., 2011). The mainly high hierarchical level where CSR topics are placed on the websites argues for the importance of CSR to organizations (Capriotti & Moreno, 2007). The frequent use of websites to communicate CSR efforts is partially explained by Müller and Chandon (2004) who found that via websites stakeholders' attitudes towards and perceptions of a brand personality can be influenced. This is due to the possibility to make messages on websites as elaborated and rich as the organization/brand wants them to be. Communication on websites reaches from articles to videos and live-chats. Also, the content of the less interactive messages on the website is highly controllable. This aspect is of special interest for the proposed research because it shall be determined how organizations themselves can communicate about their CSR effort most successfully in terms of positive consumer attitudes.

Snider et al. (2003) reinforce the relevance of websites in CSR communication by stressing that corporate and brand websites have, for instance, an extended reach due to the Internet's growing distribution around the globe, their constant and fast accessibility, and their financial advantage over expensive TV campaigns. Yet, they also observed that the high accessibility makes it also impossible to control who is reading those messages placed on the websites, so that no exclusive audience can be determined. From a consumer's perspective, it is appreciated to communicate about (organizational) CSR efforts on websites (Morsing & Schultz, 2006).

The research at hand intends to consider the strengths and weaknesses of communicating CSR via brand websites as the aim is to find those features of CSR communication which trigger positive consumer attitudes towards messages and brands. Identification of such CSR message features would allow for an optimization of CSR communication in general and on brand websites for the better of organizations and brands. Websites of brands which are involved in the consumer goods industry appear to be most suitable for this research, as on these sites organizations "disclose more ethics than corporations in other industries [*which*] might be an effect of the ongoing debate

about ethics issues among consumers and the mass media" (Tagersson, Blank, Broberg & Collin, 2009, p. 360).

FMCGs, Food Products and German Consumers – The Research Context

In order to obtain research results which allow the author to draw general conclusions for the conceptualization of brands' CSR messages, it has been decided to include different brands from the consumer goods industry into the research at hand. As mentioned before, this industry already tends to communicate its CSR efforts on websites (Tagersson et al., 2009), which suggests an experimental design for the research at hand. This approach offered the advantage that messages did not need to be invented which always has the potential of being unrealistic to research participants. Thus, real CSR messages have been taken as a basis to test for the hypothesized effects on consumer attitudes towards CSR messages and brands behind them.

Additionally, consumer goods accompany consumers in their daily life which makes it more realistic that research subjects have some kind of attitude towards given brands. In order to guarantee a comparable basis among all research participants it needed to be assured, by means of the research instrument, whether each participant knows the brands under investigation. Therefore, five brands of the fast moving consumer goods (FMCGs) and food industry have been selected for the research to which consumers (i.e. research participants) are exposed to on a nearly daily basis. By selecting brands which are known to the majority of the German population the potential research population was large and diverse: Consumers of all ages, genders and social classes frequently buy and/or consume FMCG and food products and are consequently in contact with brands behind these products.

Some products within the consumer goods and food industry offer obvious topics for CSR initiatives. For example, coffee brands tend to communicate about their produces being rainforest alliance certified[9] or fair trade products[10]. On the one hand these initiatives fit the core business of the brands which might trigger positive consumer attitudes (Stanaland et al., 2011). On the other hand, this obvious topic might also increase skepticism towards the intentions behind the CSR efforts instead of creating trust (Forehand & Grier, 2003).

A relevant aspect for the research is that there appears to be a significant difference in the way and extent to which organizations and brands communicate about their CSR efforts. Most of the brands publish at least short information about their CSR on their websites, while others

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[9] Kraft Foods Deutschland (2012). Wir übernehmen Verantwortung [Description of the social engagement]. Retrieved from: http://www.jacobsprofessional.de/jacobsprofessional/page?siteid=jacobsprofessional-prd&locale=dede1&PagecRef=586

[10] Schneider, K. (2011, September 27). Mit Fairtrade-Kaffee zum Weltrekord. [Press Release]. Retrieved from: http://www.tchibo.com/content/641886/-/pid=310330/de/presseinformationen/mit-fairtrade-kaffee-zum-weltrekord.html;jsessionid=480ECA08603779F7B03AA5628DEAC162

communicate extensively about it. Only few brands do not mention anything about being engaged in social or sustainability initiatives (like the coffee brand Dallmayr or the chocolate brand KitKat). This is another reason why actually published CSR message have been used in this research context: Today's brand website landscape offers many different approaches to CSR communication, which can be compared and tested for their effectiveness in creating positive consumer attitudes. Also, taking examples from different product categories allows for a more distinct differentiation between the CSR-brand fit for several brands (Becker-Olsen & Hill, 2005) and the other selected CSR message features.

E. Methodology

In order to investigate the effects of CSR message features on consumers' attitudes towards the messages and the brand behind it, a research method had to be chosen which allows to:

1) Measure how consumers evaluate the four CSR message features CSR motive, CSR-brand fit, CSR target and CSR message specificity
2) Find out whether the selected CSR message features are determinants credibility or scepticism of a CSR message,
3) Find out whether there is a connection between the selected CSR message features and the attitudes towards the brands.

It has been decided to combine an online survey with the presentation of CSR messages. This seemed to be the most reasonable method to address many consumers, to reveal their evaluations and effects of the named CSR message features across different brands of the FMCG sector. Online surveys are a common method to achieve a large sample size and to establish statistical relationships, as the one between CSR message features and attitudes towards CSR messages and brands (Dooley, 2001; Spector, 1991). The questionnaire was developed with the free SoSci Survey tool on soscisurvey.de[11]. Research participants have been selected via snowball sampling in order to receive data from a broad and demographically diverse sample (Dooley, 2001; Spector, 1991). Students and working consumers were provided with the link to the questionnaire via email, social networks and forums, asking them to fill in the questionnaire and to forward the link to acquaintances. The initial population of approximately 1,000 consumers who received the link to the questionnaire needed to be large, since it has been shown that questionnaires send out by email generate small response rates (for instance, Peterson, 2004).

Research Design and Procedure

In order to test actually published CSR messages which comprise the message features of interest for this research, German brand websites have been screened for their usability. A precondition for the selection of a brand and its online CSR message was the brand's publicity among German consumers. Brand knowledge was essential for this research as it was aimed at measuring the effect of CSR message features on attitudes like satisfaction, commitment, and identification which requires knowledge and prior consumption/usage of the brand. Also brands should have not been exposed in the German press recently in an extremely positive or negative context as this might have biased consumers' attitudes towards the brands. It was decided to take screenshots of the online CSR messages of the following brands (see *Appendix A The CSR Messages*):

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[11] https://www.soscisurvey.de/help/doku.php/en:start

1) Ben & Jerry's (an ice cream brand),

2) Melitta (a coffee brand),

3) Dove (a toiletries' brand by Unilever)

4) Persil (a washing agent brand by Henkel), and

5) NIVEA (a toiletries' brand by Beiersdorf).

Participants could randomly choose one of the five brands under the precondition that they consumed or bought the brand before. After having selected one brand, participants saw the corresponding screenshot of the webpage addressing the brand's CSR engagement. To guarantee that participants have actually read the text, the following control question about the content of the message was posed *Among others, BRAND XY advocates…*; consumers had then to indicate one of five options:

1) Fair trade and the reduction of carbon dioxide emission (true for Ben & Jerry's)

2) Children's right of basic education (true for NIVEA)

3) A parents' hotline in the region where the brand is located (true for Melitta)

4) Healthy alimentation and exercise among children (true for Persil)

5) Strengthening of children's and teenagers' self-esteem (true for Dove)

Wrong answering of the control question, lead to exclusion from data analysis. In continuance, the participants were asked to evaluate the message by means of 5-point Likert scales to discover their perceptions regarding the four distinct CSR message features, which made this research cross-sectional 2 x 2 x 2 x 2 factorial experiment with CSR motive (extrinsic vs. intrinsic) x CSR-brand fit (low vs. high) x CSR target (global vs. local) x CSR message specificity (low vs. high).

After having indicated their perceptions of the CSR message features, participants were asked to rate their attitudes towards the message itself, the brand behind it and their purchase intentions. After having commenting on the different statements by means of the attitudinal scales, participants gave specifics about their age, gender and educational level.

Initially, the questionnaire was developed in English, translated into German for the German research population and back translated into English by another student with high English skills to prevent from biases based upon translation errors. Also, the questionnaire has been pre-tested by two fellow students who evaluated the set-up in terms of comprehensibility and functionality.

Research Participants

The data collection took place from 27th July until 29th August 2012. In total, 588 persons started to fill in the questionnaire. Five follow-up reminder notices were posted in social networks to achieve a satisfying response rate. The amount of completed interviews which were usable for statistical

interferences and for which the control question was answered correctly amounted up to n = 251, which corresponds to a response rate of 42%.

172 female and 78 male consumers participated in the survey, while one participant opted not to indicate his or her gender. The mean age was M = 26 (12.37). Most of the participants had a university's degree (28.3%), a polytechnic degree (20.7%) or a university-entrance diploma (20.7%). The exact distribution of the demographics can be deduced from Table 1.

Table 1. Demographics of the Research Participants

Demographics	n	%	M (SD)
Gender	250		
Male	78	31.10	-
Female	172	68.50	-
Age			26 (12.37)
15 - 20	19	7.60	
21 - 30	155	61.8	
31 - 40	22	8.8	
41 - 50	31	12.4	
50 <	23	9.2	
Education			
No certification	1	.40	
Secondary school level	19	7.60	
University-entrance diploma	52	20.70	
Completed professional education	43	17.10	
Polytechnic degree	52	20.70	
University degree	71	28.30	
Do not want to indicate	5	2.00	
Other certification which is not defined here	7	2.80	

The research comprised consumers of all ages, social backgrounds and genders, because the aim was to measure how CSR needs to be communicated to create positive consumer attitudes regardless of demographic restrictions. Former investigations have mainly been conducted with students as research participants, making it difficult to translate the findings to a demographically diverse society. This shortcoming should be avoided for this research to increase generalizability.

F. Data Analysis and Results

In the subsequent paragraphs the results of the data analysis are presented. For correlations the coefficient Pearson's *r* is calculated and correlations higher than .40 are preferred. When calculating the reliability of scales a Cronbach's α of at least .70 is preferred. To all the other statistical tests a confidence interval of 95% and a significance level of .05 are applied. When a mean is calculated the corresponding standard deviation is indicated in parentheses, x̄ (*SD*).

Development and Reliability of Scales

To generate a reliable research instrument, the CSR literature has extensively been reviewed for validated scales which have been used to measure the aforementioned attitudes towards CSR communication features and brands. Yet, the scales needed to be adjusted to suit the research context. Scales have been selected to measure the attitudes brand identification, commitment, trust and satisfaction, as well as message credibility, consumer skepticism and purchase intention. For some of the selected CSR message features, no pretested scales were available. In this case, items have been formulated based upon consumer statements from qualitative studies touching on the specific CSR message feature. Respondents were asked to evaluate the stated items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *I strongly disagree*, 3 = *I neither agree nor disagree*, to 5 = *I strongly agree*. Both versions of the complete questionnaire, the German and the English one, can be found in *Appendix B The Questionnaire*.

CSR Motives. The construct of CSR motive was measured by the items (1) *I believe that this brand was built with the needs of its stakeholders in mind* from *the beginning*, (2) *This brand's effort described in the message goes beyond my expectations of what a brand needs to do to be socially responsible,* (3) *I believe that the effort described in the message stems from this brand's beliefs not from social obligation,* (4) *I think that the social initiative described on the website is a good one, but it probably just intents to increase sales and profits.*, and (5) *It seems to me that this brand engaged in the described CSR effort because it feels it has to do so.* The items were deduced from Ellen, Webb and Mohr's (2006) and Pirsch et al.'s (2007) open-ended question results as part of their surveys. Item 4 and 5 had to be re-coded. For a scale with high consistency, items 1 and 2 were excluded leading to a Cronbach's alpha of α = .69. Although CSR motives' scale reliability was slightly below the aspired Cronbach's α value, it has been decided to include it in the data analysis as it appears to be an important part within this research.

CSR-Brand Fit. Based on the work by Nan and Heo (2007) and Berens, Van Riel and Van Bruggen (2005) a scale was composed to measure consumers' perceived CSR-brand fit. The items were (1) *I think that the initiative described in the message represents a good match between the brand and the*

cause. (2) *I think that the engagement described in the message is appropriate for this brand.* (3) *I think that the engagement described in the message fits the image of the brand* and (4) *I think that the engagement described in the message is a logical social activity for this brand.* The scale achieved high scale validity, α = .83, including all four items.

CSR Target. For this CSR message feature no scales preexisted, so that items have been formulated based on Snider et al.'s (2003) qualitative analysis of corporate websites focusing on the way of presenting CSR. From this procedure originated five items: (1) *This brand tries to improve the lives of local people.* (2) *This brand strives to improve the social environment next to its facilities.* (3) *This brand tries to take responsibility on a global level.* (4) *This brand engages in a cause which is important to people far away from me.* (5) *I think that the brand's social engagement intends to improve a rather global issue than a local one.* Items 3 and 4 needed to be recoded. The exclusions of Items 1 and 2 allowed for satisfying scale consistency, α = .77.

CSR Message Specificity. Retrieved from Kim and Lee (2009), CSR message specificity was measured by means of (1) *The message contains specific indications that are verifiable.* (2) *The message contains facts about what exactly the brand's contributions are.* (3) *The content of the message is rather vague than specific.* (4) *The brand's engagement and contribution is described in an objective manner.* Item 3 had to be re-coded. Items 1 to 3 composed the final scale as they delivered sufficient consistency, α = .73.

CSR Message Credibility. Flanagin and Metzger (2007) scale to measure message credibility in an online environment was taken as a basis to measure the CSR message credibility: (1) *The message is believable.* (2) *The message is accurate.* (3) *The message is trustworthy.* (4) *The message is not biased.* Items 1 to 3 achieved a Cronbach's alpha of .78.

Skepticism towards the CSR message. Mohr, Eroglu and Ellen (1998) provided a scale for measuring "skepticism toward environmental claims in marketers' communications" (p. 30), which equaled the purpose of the skepticism scale in this research. The items were adapted to have the same wording as the other statements: (1) *I think that the message is intended to mislead rather than to inform consumers* (2) *I do not believe this message* (3) *I think that this message exaggerates* (4) *I believe that this message is true.* Item 4 was re-coded; all items were included in the final scale with α = .84.

Brand Identification. The four items which were selected to measure brand identification were deduced from Lee et al. (2010) and Fullerton (2005): (1) *Buying this brand is important to me.* (2) *It would be difficult to change my belief about this brand.* (3) *I feel a strong sense of identification with this brand.* (4) *I recognize myself in this brand.* The combination of all four items achieved α = .84.

Brand Commitment. To measure brand commitment items from different researches have been combined to measure brand commitment as a one-dimensional construct (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Fullerton, 2005; Lee et al., 2010; Perrini et al., 2010). The selected items were: (1) *I love buying this brand.* (2) *I am willing to pay a higher price for this brand over other brands.* (3) *I will not buy other brands if this brand is available at the store.* (4) *I consider myself to be loyal to this brand.* All items were used for the final scale with α = .74.

Brand Trust. As Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) dedicated their research to brand trust, items were deduced from their work: (1) *This brand is safe.* (2) *This is an honest brand.* (3) *I rely on this brand.* (4) *I trust this brand.* Cronbach's alpha, including all four items, was α = .86.

Brand Satisfaction. By combining items which have been tested by Lee et al., 2010 and Fullerton (2005), it was intended to achieve a strong scale. The selected items were (1) *I am happy about my decision to purchase this brand.* (2) *I believe I did the right thing when I purchased this brand.* (3) *Overall, I am satisfied with the decision to purchase this brand.* (4) *I am satisfied with this brand's products.* After the exclusion of item 3, the scale achieved α = .76.

Purchase Intention. The often cited work by Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2001), was also taken as a basis for the purchase intention scale, but was expanded by self-formulated items as it was intended to use no single-item scale, to increase the reliability of the measurements. The items which were used in the survey and which also achieved high consistency of was α = .87 were (1) *I intent to buy products from this brand.* (2) *The next time I need a product of this category, I'll buy it from this brand.* (3) *I would buy products from this brand again.*

The results of the scale reliability analysis including the constructs' mean values and standard deviations are summarized in Table 2:

Table 2. Psychometric Properties of the Major Study Variables

Variable	Items	M	SD	α	Range Potential	Actual
CSR Message Feature						
CSR Motives	3 - 5	2.77	0.93	**.69**	1-5	1-5
CSR-Brand Fit	1 - 4	3.35	0.94	.83	1-5	1-5
CSR Target	3 - 5	3.46	1.18	.77	1-5	1-5
CSR Message Specificity	1 - 3	2.95	0.99	.73	1-5	1-5
Attitudes towards CSR Message						
Credibility	1 - 3	3.39	0.82	.78	1-5	1-5
Skepticism	1 - 4	2.36	0.87	.84	1-5	1-4.8
Attitudes towards Brand						
Identification	1 - 4	2.25	0.95	.84	1-5	1-5
Commitment	1 - 4	2.55	0.90	.74	1-5	1-4.8
Trust	1 - 4	3.46	0.79	.86	1-5	1-5
Satisfaction	1, 2 , 4	3.91	0.77	.76	1-5	1-5
Purchase Intention	1 - 3	3.64	0.95	.87	1-5	1-5

Note. *n* = 251 for all variables. Cronbach's *α* <.70 are in boldface.

Apart from *CSR Motives* all variables, reached high scale reliability with Cronbach's *α* between .71 and .87. It is also recognizable that overall skepticism was low, *M* = 2.36 (.87), and so were also brand identification, *M* = 2.25 (.95), and brand commitment, *M* = 2.55 (.90). The mean values were below the average rate of 3.0. Research participants did apparently not perceive themselves as being committed or able to identify with the brands under study, and were not especially skeptic about the tested CSR messages in general.

The scales of the independent variables were re-coded in such a way that scores above the average score represented high CSR-brand fit, local CSR targets, high CSR message specificity and intrinsic CSR motives. Scores below the average mean score did consequently represent low CSR-brand fit, global CSR targets, low CSR message specificity and extrinsic CSR motives.

Next, the results of a profound data analysis are presented in order to evaluate the hypotheses of section *Features of CSR Messages* and to draw additional conclusions which are of interest in this context.

The Independent Study Variables

In order to make statistical differentiations, one- or multiple way analyses of variance (ANOVA and MANOVA), between the different particularities of the CSR message features, a median split was applied to the variables CSR motive, CSR-brand fit, CSR target and CSR message specificity. By means of this split each variable was separated into two testable factors. The consequently independent factors within this research were consequently, low and high CSR message specificity, low and high CSR-brand fit, extrinsic and intrinsic CSR motives, as well as between global and local CSR targets. In Table 3, the distribution is indicated per variable and group.

Table 3. **Distribution of CSR Message Features after Median Split**

Variable	Median	Mean (SD)	n	%
CSR Motives	2.67	2.77 (.93)		
Extrinsic		2.12 (.47)	145	58
Intrinsic		3.67 (.57)	106	42
CSR-Brand Fit	3.5	3.35 (.94)		
Low		2.66 (.64)	139	55
High		4.20 (.39)	112	45
CSR Target	4.00	3.46 (1.18)		
Global		2.47 (.92)	121	48
Local		4.28 (.38)	130	52
CSR Message Specificity	3.0	2.95 (.99)		
Low		2.22 (.57)	144	57
High		3.93 (.47)	107	43

Note. n = 251 for all CSR message features.

The distribution is quite balanced allowing for further statistical inferences. The majority of the participants chose to evaluate the brand NIVEA (n = 110), followed by Dove (n = 49), Ben& Jerry's (n = 44), Persil (n = 27) and Melitta (n = 21). Yet, the focus of this study is not on the brands themselves but on the perceptions of the CSR messages, so that no differentiation will be made between the brands in the following statistical analyses.

The Effect of CSR Message Features on Consumer Attitudes - Analysis of Variances

To test for the hypotheses and to find out to what extent the four CSR message features affect the attitudes of the research participants towards the CSR message and the brand behind it, several analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted. It was started with the effect of the message features on the attitudes towards the CSR messages.

CSR Message Features and their Effect on Attitudes towards the CSR Message. In order to test the effect of the four selected message features on the collected data one-way ANOVA was performed for each message feature. Each CSR message feature was tested for its statistical influence on the consumer attitudes credibility of and skepticism towards the CSR message. Except for CSR target, all CSR message features had a significant effect on credibility of and skepticism towards the CSR messages. The effect of CSR target was only significant on credibility, not on skepticism. The statistical results of the four separately conducted ANOVAs are displayed in Table 4:

Table 4. Significant Main Effects of CSR Message Features on Attitudes towards CSR Messages

Variable	F	p	M	SD	N
Credibility	(1,249) = 33.22	<.001	3.40	.82	251
Extrinsic CSR Motive			3.16	.81	145
Intrinsic CSR Motive			3.73	.72	106
Skepticism	(1,249) = 43.13	<.001	2.36	.87	251
Extrinsic CSR Motive			2.69	.85	127
Intrinsic CSR Motive			2.02	.75	124
Credibility	(1,249) = 41.50	<.001	3.40	.82	251
Low Specificity			3.13	.75	144
High Specificity			3.76	.78	107
Skepticism	(1,249) = 22.51	<.001	2.32	.05	251
Low Specificity			2.57	.80	144
High Specificity			2.07	.87	107
Credibility	(1,249) = 37.02	<.001	3.40	.82	251
Low CSR-Brand Fit			3.13	.83	139
High CSR-Brand Fit			3.73	.69	112
Skepticism	(1,249) = 20.04	<.001	2.36	.87	251
Low CSR-Brand Fit			2.57	.88	139
High CSR-Brand Fit			2.09	.79	112

Variable	F	p	M	SD	N
Credibility	(1,249) = 4.70	.031	3.40	.82	251
Global CSR Target			3.28	.91	121
Local CSR Target			3.51	.72	130
Skepticism	(1,249) = 1.030	**.311**	2.36	.87	251
Global CSR Target			2.42	.93	121
Local CSR Target			2.30	.81	130

Note. Non-significant main effects for CSR target on skepticism towards the CSR messages with *p* > .05 are printed in bold.

The main effects revealed that credibility rates were higher among participants who perceived the CSR messages to be high in specificity, and to represent a high CSR-brand fit directed at a local target as well as intrinsic CSR motives. In contrast, the skepticism level increased for perceptions of low message specificity and low CSR-brand fit, as well as for as extrinsic perceived CSR motives. These findings resulted in the acceptance of hypotheses H1a and b, H3a and b, H5a, H7a and b, but lead to the rejection of H5b: the extent of skepticism towards a CSR message was not influenced by the CSR target being local or global.

CSR Message Features and their Effect on Attitudes towards Brands. One-way ANOVA was applied to the data to check for the effect of all four CSR message features on the five measured attitudes towards the brand: brand identification, commitment, trust, satisfaction, and purchase intention.

First, the message feature CSR-brand fit was tested. All five attitudes towards the brand behind the message were significantly affected by this message feature on *p* <.001 levels; the exact statistical parameters are summarized in Table 5:

Table 5. Significant Main Effects for CSR-Brand Fit on Attitudes towards Brands behind the Messages

Variable	F	p	M	SD	N
Trust	(1,249) = 17.89	<.001	3.46	.79	251
Low			3.28	.80	139
High			3.69	.72	112
Satisfaction	(1,249) = 33.24	<.001	3.91	.77	251
Low			3.67	.81	139
High			4.20	.61	112
Commitment	(1,249) = 25.97	<.001	2.55	.90	251
Low			2.30	.85	139
High			2.85	.90	110
Identification	(1,249) = 31.16	<.001	2.25	.95	251
Low			1.93	.76	139
High			2.64	1.01	112
Purchase Intention	(1,249) = 27.54	<.001	3.64	.95	251
Low			3.37	1.02	139
High			3.97	.74	112

From the data in Table 5 it can be deduced that those participants who rated the CSR-brand fit of the read message to be low also indicated significantly lower brand trust, satisfaction, and commitment, identification as well as purchase intentions, than those participants who perceived a high CSR-brand fit in the CSR message. Thus, hypotheses H4a - d were fully accepted and 11b was partially accepted as an effect of CSR brand fit on purchase intention could already be found. Yet, the mediating effect of attitudes towards the CSR message and the other four consumer attitudes towards brands still needs to be investigated.

Second, CSR motives were tested for their effect on the attitudes towards brands. Significant main effects were found for CSR motive on brand trust, satisfaction, commitment and identification, but not for purchase intention. For a clear overview, the statistical parameters are presented in Table 6:

Table 6. Significant Main Effects for CSR Motives on Attitudes towards Brands behind the Messages

Variable	F	p	M	SD	N
Trust	(1,249) = 12.36	.001	3.46	.79	251
Extrinsic			3.31	.76	145
Intrinsic			3.66	.80	106
Satisfaction	(1,249) = 6.08	.014	3.91	.77	251
Extrinsic			3.81	.71	145
Intrinsic			4.05	.83	106
Commitment	(1,249) = 4.73	.031	2.55	.90	251
Extrinsic			2.44	.92	145
Intrinsic			2.69	.85	106
Identification	(1,249) = 9.21	.003	2.25	.95	251
Extrinsic			2.10	.93	145
Intrinsic			2.46	.94	106
Purchase Intention	**(1,249) = 2.69**	**.102**	3.64	.95	251
Extrinsic			3.56	.95	145
Intrinsic			3.75	.94	106

Note. Non-significant main effects for CSR motive on attitudes towards the brands with $p > .05$ are printed in bold.

Consequently, participants who perceived an intrinsic CSR motive showed significantly higher brand trust, satisfaction, commitment and identification than those who perceived the CSR motive of the brand to be intrinsic than those who perceived the CSR motives to be extrinsic. Therefore, Hypotheses H2a - d are also accepted. Yet, hypothesis H11a had to be rejected, as purchase intention is not significantly higher for participants who observe intrinsic motives in CSR messages.

Third, the effects of CSR target as a message feature on consumer attitudes towards brands were tested. It could be observed that CSR target had significant effects on all attitudes towards brands. For a detailed overview about the exact statistical parameters, please see Table 7:

Table 7. Significant Main Effects for CSR Target on Attitudes towards Brands behind the Messages

Variable	F	p	M	SD	N
Trust	(1, 249) = 4.28	.040	3.46	.79	251
Global			3.31	.85	121
Local			3.60	.71	130
Satisfaction	(1, 249) = 3.51	.015	3.91	.77	251
Global			3.79	.82	121
Local			4.02	.71	130
Commitment	(1,249) = 4.56	.034	2.55	.90	251
Global			2.42	.90	121
Local			2.66	.89	130
Identification	(1,249) = 5.32	.022	2.25	.06	251
Global			2.11	.92	121
Local			2.38	.97	130
Purchase Intention	(1,249) = 4.28	.040	3.64	.95	251
Global			3.51	1.07	121
Local			3.76	.81	130

Apparently, participants indicated higher brand identification, commitment, trust, satisfaction and purchase intention when the CSR message communicated a local CSR target compared to the levels of participants who read about a global CSR target. Thus, hypotheses H6a-d and were accepted. H11c was partially accepted. Additionally analysis is needed to determine whether consumer attitudes towards CSR messages and brands behind the messages mediate the direct effect of CSR target on purchase intentions.

Fourth, the feature CSR message specificity was tested for its effect on the different attitudes towards brands. One-way ANOVAs showed that message specificity affected all attitudes towards the brands significantly. The effects mean that participants who perceived the CSR message to be low in specificity evaluated their own brand trust, satisfaction, commitment, identification and purchase intention lower than those participants who perceived the CSR messages to be high in specificity. Consequently, hypotheses H8a-d could be accepted as well. H11d is partially accepted while mediating effects of consumer attitudes towards CSR messages and the message sending brands still needed to be confirmed. The statistical parameters are summarized in Table 8:

Table 8. Significant Main Effects for CSR Message Specificity on Attitudes towards Brands behind the Messages

Variable	F	p	M	SD	N
Trust	(1, 249) = 9.29	.003	3.46	.79	251
Low			3.33	.79	144
High			3.64	.77	107
Satisfaction	(1, 249) = 20.78	<.001	3.91	.77	251
Low			3.71	.76	144
High			4.16	.72	107
Commitment	(1,249) = 12.82	<.001	2.55	.90	251
Low			2.38	.92	144
High			2.78	.82	107
Identification	(1,249) = 7.95	.005	2.25	.95	251
Low			2.11	.91	144
High			2.44	.98	107
Purchase Intention	(1,249) = 21.99	<.001	3.64	.96	251
Low			3.41	.96	144
High			3.95	.84	107

The Contribution of CSR Message Features to the Prediction of Consumer Attitudes towards CSR Messages and Brands

In order to test for the predictive power of the four CSR message features on consumers' attitudes towards CSR messages and the brands behind the CSR messages, multiple regression analyses were carried out. The previous ANOVAs formed a useful basis for these inferences.

First, the contribution of each message feature to the ratings of CSR message credibility and skepticism towards the CSR message was tested. The results are presented in Table 9. The findings demonstrate that CSR motives, CSR-brand fit and CSR message specificity were significant predictors of participants' perceptions of credibility. The more intrinsic consumers perceived the CSR motives conveyed by means of the CSR message, and the higher they perceived the communicated CSR-brand fit and CSR message specificity, the higher was consumers' indicated level of message credibility, R^2 = .36, $p < .001$.

For skepticism towards the CSR message, CSR message specificity and CSR motives were the only significant predictors. Specifically, high specificity and intrinsic CSR Motives let skepticism ratings decrease. The model has moderate predictive power, R^2 = .31, which means that the variance of CSR message credibility is at least for around one third explained by the presented model.

The findings add to the earlier observed main effects that CSR target is not of relevance for the prediction of consumers' evaluation of CSR message credibility; and that neither CSR target nor CSR-brand fit are relevant for the prediction of perceptions of consumer skepticism towards CSR messages. These observations confirm accepting H1a and H1b, H3a, H7a and H7b, but weaken the earlier found main effects that were hypothesized under H3b and H5a.

Table 9. CSR Message Features and Attitudes towards the Message

Variable	B	SE (B)	β	t	p	R^2
Model "Credibility"						.36
Constant	1.33	.21		6.40	< .001	
CSR Motive	.23	.05	.26	4.65	< .001	
CSR-Brand Fit	.16	.05	.18	3.26	.001	
CSR Target	.001	.04	.001	.03	**.978**	
Specificity	.31	.05	.37	6.69	< .001	
Model "Skepticism"						.31
Constant	4.17	.23		18.37	< .001	
CSR-Brand Fit	-.06	.05	-.06	-1.09	**.279**	
Specificity	-.26	.05	-.29	-5.13	< .001	
CSR Motives	-.34	.05	-.37	-6.39	< .001	
CSR Target	.03	.04	.04	.669	**.504**	

Note. Insignificant predictors with $p > .05$ are printed in bold. $F_{Credibility}(4,246) = 34.48$, $p < .001$; $F_{Skepticism}(4,246) = 27.43$, $p < .001$

Second, the CSR message features were tested by means of multiple regression analysis for their predicting influence on the consumer attitudes towards brands. The resulting statistical parameters can be deduced from Table 10.

CSR motive and CSR-brand fit were found to be the only significant predictors of brand identification and brand commitment. The higher consumers rated the CSR-brand fit to be and the more intrinsic they perceived the CSR motive to be, the higher were their scores on brand identification and brand commitment. The main effects that were accepted under H2a and H2b, H4a and H4b are supported by these findings. The significant influence of CSR target and CSR message specificity on identification (H6a and H8a) and on commitment (H6b and H8b) had no relevance for the prediction of consumers' attitudes towards the messages.

All message features appear to be significant predictors of brand trust, which is also in line with the found main effects on these consumer attitudes, which led to the acceptance of H2c, H4c, H6c, and H8c.

In contrast to brand trust, brand satisfaction could not be predicted by all CSR message features, as only CSR-brand fit and CSR message specificity were revealed to significantly predict ratings on the brand satisfaction scale. This supports only the main effects found in line with H4d and H8d, but not the ones observed and predicted by H2d and H6d.

Table 10. CSR Message Features and Attitudes towards Brands

Variable	B	SE (B)	β	t	p	R^2
Model "Brand Identification"						.19
Constant	.37	.27		1.38	**.169**	
CSR Motive	.19	.06	.18	2.93	.004	
CSR-Brand Fit	.31	.06	.31	4.88	< .001	
CSR Target	.06	.05	.07	1.24	**.215**	
Specificity	.04	.06	-04	.66	**.513**	
Model "Brand Commitment"						.15
Constant	.93	.26		3.58	< .001	
CSR Motive	.16	.06	.16	2.56	.011	
CSR-Brand Fit	.21	.06	.21	3.31	.001	
CSR Target	.06	.05	.07	1.18	**.239**	
Specificity	.10	.06	.11	1.73	**.085**	
Model "Brand Trust"						.18
Constant	1.83	.23		8.13	< .001	
CSR Motive	.13	.05	.15	2.47	.014	
CSR-Brand Fit	.15	.05	.18	2.86	.005	
CSR Target	.12	.04	.18	2.92	.004	
Specificity	.11	.05	.14	2.29	.023	
Model "Brand Satisfaction"						.15
Constant	2.53	.22		11.05	< .001	
CSR Motive	.05	.05	.07	1.02	**.311**	
CSR-Brand Fit	.21	.05	.25	3.90	< .001	
CSR Target	.07	.04	.10	1.63	**.103**	
Specificity	.10	.05	.13	2.10	.037	

Note. Insignificant predictors with $p > .05$ are printed in bold. $F_{Identification}(4,246) = 14.82$, $p < .001$; $F_{Commitment}(4,246) = 10.61$, $p < .001$; $F_{Trust}(4,246) = 13.59$, $p < .001$; $F_{Satisfaction}(4,246) = 10.59$, $p < .001$

A general remark regarding the predictive power of CSR message features for consumers' attitudes towards brands is, that the individual R^2 values are rather low, hinting at other significant influences on the observed consumer attitudes towards brands.

The Contribution of Consumer Attitudes towards CSR Messages to the Prediction of Consumer Attitudes towards Brands

As hypothesized under H9 and H10, a relationship between attitudes towards the CSR message and the attitudes towards the brands was expected. Therefore, multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine whether credibility and skepticism, but also the different CSR message features predicted the measured consumer attitude towards brands significantly. The specific statistical findings are presented in Table 11.

Multiple regression analysis determined the insignificance of attitudes towards CSR messages for the consumer attitudes brand identification, brand commitment and brand satisfaction, but pointed out that CSR-brand fit is the only significant predictor of these three consumer attitudes. This adds to the prior findings that, in the presence of all tested CSR message features and attitudes towards CSR messages, only CSR-brand fit plays a significant role in predicting brand identification, commitment and satisfaction. Higher ratings of CSR-brand fit, lead to higher ratings of brand identification, commitment and satisfaction accounting for 23%, 16% and again 16% of the variance of these constructs. Hence, H9a, H9b, H9d, H10a, H10b and H10d had to be rejected.

Findings for brand trust were different. Skepticism towards the CSR message, CSR-brand fit and CSR target were revealed to be significant predictors of brand trust. Higher ratings on skepticism negatively influenced the extent to which consumers trust a brand, while higher ratings of CSR-brand fit and CSR targets as being perceived as local were connected to higher brand trust values. Consequently, H9c was rejected, while H10c was accepted because skepticism towards CSR messages had a significantly negative influence on consumers' brand trust ratings.

Table 11. Attitudes towards Brands via CSR Message Features and Attitudes towards Messages

Variable	B	SE (B)	β	t	p	R^2
Model "Brand Identification"						.23
Constant	.62	.50		1.25	**.212**	
CSR Motive	.11	.07	.10	1.56	**.120**	
CSR-Brand Fit	.28	.06	.27	4.31	< .001	
CSR Target	.06	.05	.08	1.33	**.186**	
Specificity	-.05	.06	-.05	-.70	**.482**	
Skepticism	-.12	.08	-.11	-1.39	**.166**	
Credibility	.18	.09	.15	1.92	**.056**	
Model "Brand Commitment"						.16
Constant	1.36	.50		2.79	**.006**	
CSR Motive	.11	.07	.11	1.61	**.108**	
CSR-Brand Fit	.19	.06	.20	3.03	.003	
CSR Target	.06	.05	.08	1.25	**.212**	
Specificity	.06	.06	.06	.89	**.375**	
Skepticism	.12	.08	.11	-1.42	**.157**	
Credibility	.05	.09	.04	.49	**.622**	
Model "Brand Trust"						.24
Constant	2.42	.41		5.88	< .001	
CSR Motive	.04	.06	.05	.70	**.487**	
CSR-Brand Fit	.12	.05	.14	2.29	.023	
CSR Target	.12	.04	.18	3.13	.002	
Specificity	.03	.05	.03	.51	**.613**	
Skepticism	-.18	.07	-.20	-2.63	.009	
Credibility	.13	.08	.14	1.74	**.084**	
Model "Brand Satisfaction"						.16
Constant	2.95	.42		7.05	< .001	
CSR Motive	.01	.06	.01	.09	**.932**	
CSR-Brand Fit	.19	.05	.24	3.58	< .001	
CSR Target	.07	.04	.11	1.72	**.087**	
Specificity	.06	.05	.08	1.14	**.256**	
Skepticism	-.11	.07	-.13	-1.62	**.107**	
Credibility	.04	.08	.05	.55	**.585**	

Note. Insignificant predictors with $p > .05$ are printed in bold. $F_{Identification}(6,244) = 11.94$, $p < .001$; $F_{Commitment}(6,244) = 7.74$, $p < .001$; $F_{Trust}(6,244) = 12.67$, $p < .001$; $F_{Satisfaction}(6,244) = 7.94$, $p < .001$

The Contribution of CSR Message Features and Consumer Attitudes towards CSR Messages and Brands to Consumers' Purchase Intentions

Finally, it was hypothesized (H11a-d) that consumers' purchase intention is influenced by CSR message features, attitudes towards brands and attitudes towards the CSR message features. To test all these constructs for their share in the prediction of purchase intention, another multiple regression analysis was conducted.

Results, as visualized in Table 12, show that attitudes towards CSR messages are insignificant for the prediction of purchase intention. However, the CSR message features CSR motives and CSR message specificity in combination with the brand attitudes commitment, trust and satisfaction were found to be significant predictors of purchase intention, explaining 60% of the variance. In detail the below results show that high CSR message specificity, brand commitment, brand trust and brand satisfaction led to higher purchase intentions, while intrinsic CSR motives let the purchase intention decrease. Thus, only H11d can be partially accepted, because high CSR message specificity had in combination with some attitudes towards the brands a positive effect on purchase intentions, yet attitudes towards the CSR message were not of importance as it was hypothesized. H11a to H11c have to be completely rejected because the CSR message features had either not the proposed positive effect on purchase intentions (H11a) or the constructs were not significant predictors at all.

Table 12. Attitudes towards the Message and Brand on Purchase Intention

Variable	B	$SE (B)$	$β$	t	p	R^2
Model "Purchase Intention"						.60
Constant	-.14	.41		-.34	**.732**	
CSR Motive	-.133	.05	-.13	-2.69	.008	
CSR-Brand Fit	.06	.05	.06	1.28	**.201**	
CSR Target	.04	.04	.05	1.08	**.281**	
Specificity	.12	.05	.12	2.56	.011	
Credibility	.002	.07	.002	.03	**.977**	
Skepticism	.05	.06	.04	.77	**.444**	
Brand Identification	.07	.06	.07	1.060	**.291**	
Brand Commitment	.31	.06	.29	4.83	< .001	
Brand Trust	.38	.07	.32	5.62	< .001	
Brand Satisfaction	.28	.06	.23	4.37	< .001	

Note. Insignificant predictors with $p > .05$ are printed in bold. $F_{PurchaseIntention}(10,240) = 36.36$, $p < .001$

Additional Analyses

In addition to the statistical inferences that were conducted to test the earlier proposed hypotheses, it was decided to investigate whether some of the constructs under study interact with each other. Results of these tests are presented in the following paragraphs as they appear to add relevant information for answering the research question in more detail.

Interaction between CSR message features and their effect on attitudes towards CSR messages. Testing for interaction was necessary to identify potentially important message feature combinations which improve or weaken the effect of CSR messages on consumer attitudes. Therefore, 2x4 MANOVA was conducted to test for interactions between the CSR message features and their effect on message credibility and on skepticism towards the message.

Significant interaction could only be detected for CSR message specificity and CSR motive having an effect on credibility, $M = 3.49$, $SE = .05$, $F(1,235) = 5.02$, $p = .026$. The credibility of the CSR message was significantly higher, when participants evaluated the CSR message to be high in specificity and the CSR motives to be intrinsic, $M = 4.04$ $SE = .11$, compared to participants who evaluated the message specificity to be low and CSR motives to be extrinsic, $M = 3.17$ $SE = .09$. The interaction effect is visualized in Figure 3.

Figure 3. CSR Message Specificity and CSR Motives interact in their effect on perceived Credibility of CSR Messages
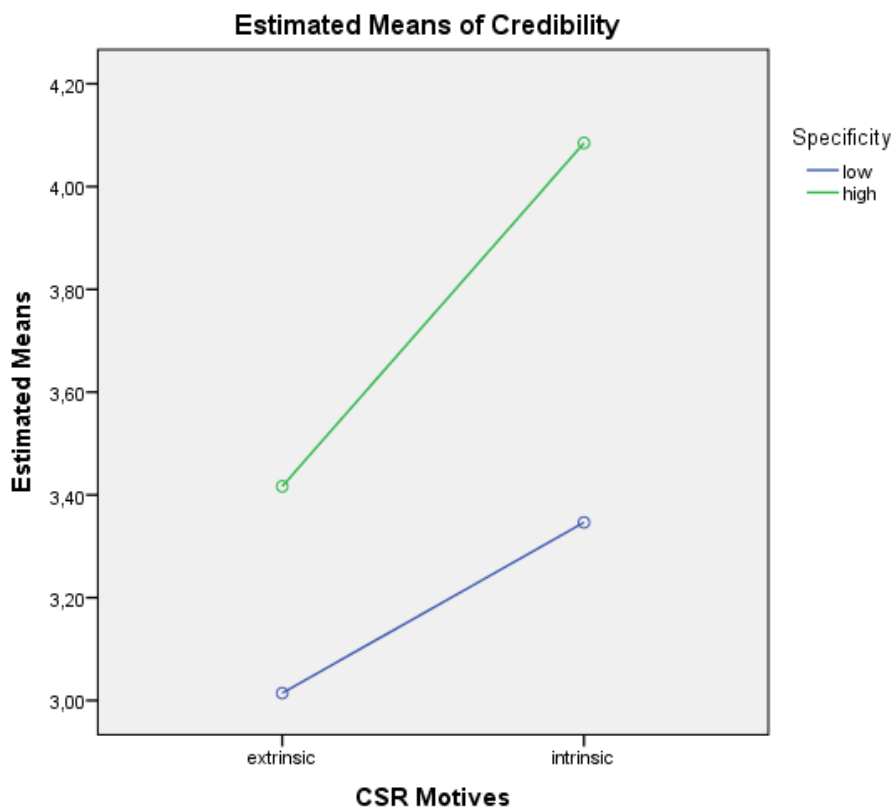
Interaction between CSR message features and their effect on attitudes towards brands. In order to check for potential interactions between the CSR message features, two ANOVAs were conducted. While no interaction of CSR message features could be observed having an effect on brand satisfaction, brand commitment, brand trust and purchase intention, a significant interaction was found between CSR motive and CSR message specificity with an effect on brand identification, M = 2.29, SE = .06, $F(1, 235)$ = 6.03, p = .015. Research participants who perceived the CSR motive to be intrinsic and who perceived the CSR message specificity to be high, indicated higher brand identification, M = 2.60 SE = .14, than those participants who perceived the message specificity to be low or the CSR motives to be extrinsic. The interaction is visualized in Figure 4.

Figure 4. The Interaction between CSR Message Specificity x CSR motives and their effect on Brand Identification
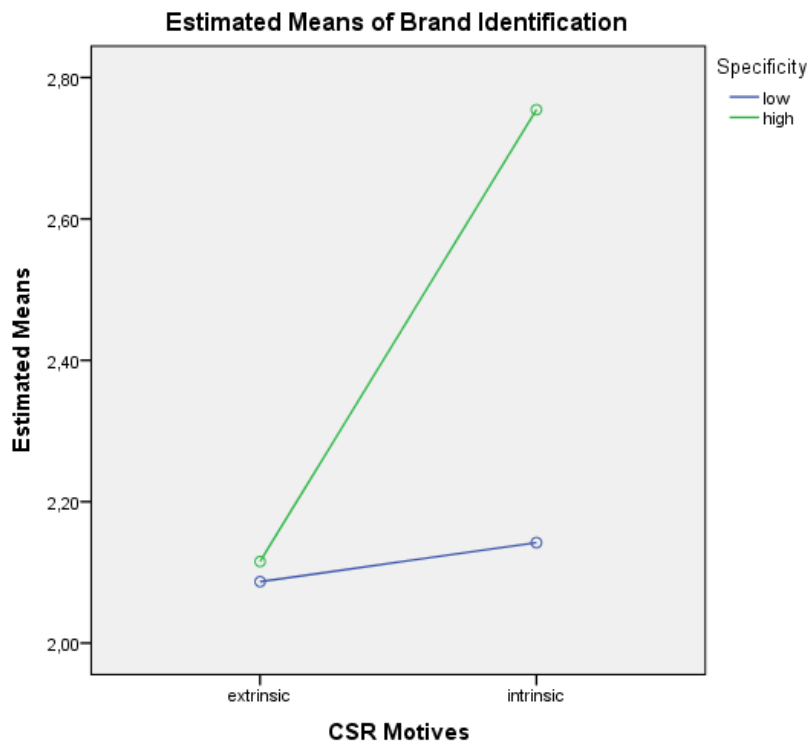
G. Discussion and Conclusions

The objective of the research at hand was to find out to what extent certain CSR message features influence specific consumer attitudes towards CSR messages and towards the brands behind these messages. The conducted investigations led to several findings which shall be contrasted with results of prior studies within the academic field of CSR communication. Apart from that practical suggestions and recommendations are formulated which are intended to improve CSR message creations for the better of consumer-brand relationships.

On the Potential of CSR Message Features to influence Skepticism towards and Credibility of CSR Messages

Message Credibility. As it has been hypothesized, credibility of CSR messages was found to be higher for CSR messages which are perceived as being specific, conveying intrinsic motives, and representing a high CSR-brand fit with a local target. Highest credibility was measured for messages that were perceived as being high in specificity. This finding supports earlier observations (Flanagin & Metzger, 2007) that name accuracy, which is part of the present definition of specificity, as one facet of web-based messages generating credibility among the audience. The present research adds to these earlier findings that the positive effect of specificity on credibility also applies to CSR messages and that this effect might be even higher, when a CSR message is perceived as conveying simultaneously intrinsic CSR motives. Although there are findings which suggest that consumers also accept extrinsic motives when they are communicated openly (Barone et al., 2000; Forehand & Grier, 2003), the current observations allow for the supposition that consumers rely more on CSR messages which they perceive as deriving from true moral convictions.

In addition to that, Yoon, Gürhan-Canli and Schwarz (2006) stress that perceived sincerity, which is comparable to the present definition of intrinsic motives, positively influences consumers' company evaluations, while perceptions of insincerity negatively influence this evaluation. Attitudes towards brands are likewise based upon evaluations, so that Yoon et al.'s findings appear to be supportive in this context. Yet, the most influencing aspect of CSR messages on credibility in this research appears to be that consumers regard the content of the message to be verifiable and specific. As the research was conducted in Germany, Germans high uncertainty avoidance might have also influenced these outcomes. According to Hofstede's uncertainty avoidance index, Germans need profound information before relying on a given topic.[12]

Specificity is of high importance in this specific context as the brand behind the message is the uncontrolled author of the presented text on the brand website. It was mentioned before that

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the degree to which a brand or organization is able to control the content of a message potentially weakens the credibility and sincerity of the message (Du et al., 2010; Pomering & Dolnicar, 2009; Yoon et al. 2006). In this regard, this research adds to current findings (Darely & Smith, 1993; Kim & Lee, 2009) that high accuracy and specificity are able to mitigate skepticism and increase credibility of messages which are solely created by brands.

Skepticism towards CSR Messages. Furthermore, a remarkable observation was that general skepticism towards the messages was low, M = 2.36 (.87). On the one hand, this observation might depend on the FMCG business sector as the research context. Bhattacharya and Sen (2004) propose that consumers encounter certain business sectors with more cynicism and skepticism than others. The FMCG sector might be one which consumers are per se less skeptical of, as compared to the banking sector, for instance as demonstrated by Pomering and Dolnicar (2009).

On the other hand, the rather low general skepticism level might stem from a difference between consumers' evaluations regarding CSR communications versus CSR-free advertisings. According to Pomering and Dolnicar (2009) skepticism towards CSR messages is lower than consumers' general skepticism towards marketing communication and advertisings (Obermiller & Spangenberg, (1998). Yet, it needs to be noted that the indicated levels of skepticism were not the same for all CSR messages in this research. Consumers showed the highest skepticism within the study when they perceived CSR motives to be extrinsic, M = 2.69 (85). Additionally, skepticism was the lowest for messages featuring high specificity M = 2.07 (.87). This observation might be regarded as support for the previous statements regarding the importance of CSR message specificity as a potential determinant of message credibility.

As it has been presumed skepticism was significantly higher for messages conveying low message specificity. Consumers might have evaluated low message specificity as a manner of deception, which has been shown to result in skepticism (Becker-Olsen & Hill, 2005; Forehand & Grier, 2003). Being perceived as a brand, which strives for consumer deception by not providing explicit and accurate information about their CSR efforts needs to be clearly avoided, calling again for thoroughly elaborated CSR messages.

On the Potential of CSR Message Features to influence Consumer Attitudes towards Brands

Before going into the single effect of CSR message features on consumers' brand attitudes, it needs to be stated that participants indicated remarkably low general brand commitment, M = 2.55 (.90), and brand identification, M = 2.25 (.95). This observation is probably based upon the selection of FMCG brands for this research. The products of these brands are not overly expensive and are consumed within a short time-frame which makes switching to other brands easier. This is also the

reason why it was investigated whether CSR message have the potential to change this loose relationship into a more constant bond between brands and consumers. Contrastingly, higher ratings on brand identification could be expected after reading the CSR messages, based upon the assumption that "identification with an organization engaged in do-good CSR actions can contribute to consumers' self-esteem" (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001, p. 228). Having stated that, Sen and Bhattacharya made the same observation, namely that identification with, in their case, an organization based upon CSR is rather weak.

Next, the detected effects of the CSR message features on the single consumer attitudes towards brands shall be discussed.

Brand Identification. Consumers indicated identification with a brand was significantly influenced by all CSR message features. High CSR message specificity and intrinsic CSR motives interacted in their positive effect on this consumer attitude, while CSR motive and CSR-brand fit were found to be the only significant predictors of brand identification in this study.

Considering the definition of brand identification (see *Attitudes towards the Brands behind the CSR Messages*), the observed interaction and predictive power of perceived specificity and CSR motives is comprehensible. It is likely that intrinsic CSR motives and high specificity are regarded as attractive traits of the brands. As attractiveness of a brand's personality is suggested to increase consumers desire to associate with this brand (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Kim et al., 2001), the research at hand might be a first step in answering Maignan and Ferrell's (2001) call for investigations whether the "evaluations of overall corporate citizenship give rise to bonds of identification…" (p. 469).

The relevance of CSR-brand fit for indications of brand identification might be explained by exterior influences that were not considered in this study. Investigations in related contexts suggest that the perceived external prestige of a commercial entity in terms of CSR influences people's identification with this entity (Kim, Lee, Lee, Kim, 2010).

Brand Commitment. As it was hypothesized, consumer scored higher on attitudes towards the brand when they perceived the CSR target to be local. According to Boulstridge and Carrigan (2000) and Torres et al. (2012) this result is due to consumers' perceptions that they could rather benefit from local CSR initiatives than from global CSR efforts. These perceptions also stem from local CSR initiatives being rather perceived as meeting specific needs of the CSR target. In this regard, it is noticeable that the observed mean value for brand commitment of consumers who observed local CSR targets being mentioned in the message was not higher than *M* = 2.66 (.89).

However, just as brand identification, brand commitment was predicted by CSR motives and CSR fit: The more the brand's CSR motives were perceived as being intrinsic and the higher the CSR-

brand fit was evaluated, the higher was consumers' indicated brand commitment. Amine's (1998) literature review offers valuable input for the interpretation of this observation. He summarizes that brand commitment depends on consumers' evaluations of "[…] perceived differences about alternatives, perceived risk, brand sensitivity and brand attachment/liking […]" (p. 312, 1998). Risk, in this context is related to the expected ability of a brand to perform according to its promises. Brand sensitivity comprises the consumers need for information regarding the brand.

Following Amine's (1998) assumption that these four factors have an impact on the level of brand commitment, the research findings at hand might present CSR message features that act on these factors. Intrinsic CSR motives and high CSR-brand fit might add positively to the perceived differentiation of a given brand compared to other brands and might provide consumers with valuable information about the brand that other brands do not provide. Apart from that, both CSR message particularities might influence brand commitment positively via an increased liking of the brand. In contrast, low CSR-brand fit and extrinsic CSR motives might negatively influence brand sensitive consumers as they come to know as negative perceived information about the brand. These propositions require additional investigations in this direction.

Brand Trust. All CSR message features affected consumers' ratings of brand trust significantly and all CRS message features were significant predictors of trust in the brands.

For example, the intrinsic particularity of CSR motives led to higher trust ratings. In the field of interpersonal relationships, a close relationship between two persons shows also high correlations between as intrinsic perceived motives and trust towards the other (Rempel, Holmes & Zanna, 1985). According to Aaker (1997), brands are owners' of personalities as well, so that it is suggested to apply the knowledge of interpersonal relationships to the current context. Hence, it is possible that consumers, who evaluated the CSR message of a brand to convey CSR efforts that stem from core values and moral conviction, tend to evaluate the brand as a relational partner which is benevolent and creating a sense of security (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003). Consumers could therefore be more motivated to trust in the brand. This assumption needs more support calling for future investigations on the relationship between intrinsic CSR motives as part of CSR communication as a potential determinant of stronger brand trust.

Apart from the positive effects of intrinsic CSR motives, CSR-brand fit also demonstrated its potential to influence brand trust. In case, the CSR-brand fit was perceived as being low, levels of brand trust were lower than for perceptions of high CSR-brand fit. Although, investigating the effect of fit on credibility and trust of consumers towards organizations rather than brands, Becker-Olsen and Hill's (2005) research is considered to be a valuable support for this finding. In their research trust was also higher for high CSR-brand fit perceptions.

Borrowing from Delgado-Ballester et al. (2003) it is assumed that high CSR-brand fit and CSR message specificity might have triggered the technical level of trust which is deduced from facts about the brand that the consumer knows. Consumers in this research evaluated the extent of CSR-brand fit, and did base this evaluation probably on their knowledge about the brands. Thus, it is likely that those persons who came to the conclusion that there is a high fit between the CSR initiative described in the message and the brand have good reason to trust the brand.

Also, trust and credibility are constructs which appear to depend on similar antecedents. Therefore, the same line of reasoning as for the effect of message specificity on message credibility could be stated here, for instance, that high specificity helps to increase perceived security and confidence that the statements regarding CSR are true which in turn motivates consumers to trust (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003).

CSR target as a CSR message feature was only relevant for the prediction of brand trust; the perception of a rather local than global CSR target was connected to higher brand trust indications. The academic literature does not yet offer profound explanations for this observation. Solely, Torres et al. (2012) state that global brands are well advised to develop local CSR strategies as this is supposed to increase trust, yet they remain at this point without offering more detailed reasons.

Morsing (2006) offers a potential explanation for this shortcoming by highlighting corporations' difficulties with developing and communicating CSR messages that are trusted. The research at hand might add to her work that engaging in local CSR efforts and communicating about them might be one of the few message contents that have the potential to create trust among consumers and other stakeholders.

Brand Satisfaction. The indicated level of brand satisfaction was remarkably high among consumers who evaluated the CSR message they read to be transporting intrinsic CSR motives, M = 4.05 (.83). Generally, satisfaction with a brand is the result of a more or less elaborated evaluation process regarding the brand's ability to meet consumers' expectations. Earlier investigation (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Yoon et al., 2004; Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001) argue that being perceived as being strongly committed to CSR influences consumers' overall assessment and attitude towards organizations, and probably brands, positively. Having the scale by which CSR motives were measured in this research in mind, it is safe to state that consumers who come to the conclusion that the message is based upon intrinsic CSR motives perceive the brand to be strong in terms of CSR commitment. Hence, the current findings appear to support the previous notions of a connection between CSR and consumer satisfaction. Yet, CSR as an influencing factor on satisfaction is specified by explicitly naming intrinsic CSR motives as the key driver.

In addition to that, high CSR-brand fit was connected to the highest significant scores on all attitudes towards brands, especially on brand satisfaction, M = 4.21 (.62). Garbarino and Johnson (1999) point out that satisfaction is especially important for weak relationships between commercial entities and consumers. Other attitudes towards organizations and towards future intentions (i.e. purchase intentions) of occasional customers are mediated by satisfaction according to their investigations. This research did not observe the mediating effects of satisfaction on brand identification and commitment, but on purchase intention. Consumers' satisfaction was indeed found to be one predicting variable for purchase intentions. This might imply that Garbarino and Johnson's (1999) observations are also correct for attitudes towards brands and allows for the assumption that brand satisfaction might also impact the other consumer attitudes that were subject to this study. By concentrating on the achievement of high consumer satisfaction rather weak brand-consumer bonds might therefore be strengthened. Selecting and communicating CSR initiatives which represent a high fit with the brand's core business might be a promising tool to achieve this objective.

Purchase Intention. Purchase intention as indicated by consumers participating in this research was predicted by CSR motive, CSR message specificity, brand commitment, brand trust and brand satisfaction. The effect of brand satisfaction on purchase intention has already been discussed in the previous paragraphs, so that it is refrained from touching on this point again.

The role of brand commitment as a predictor of purchase intention is based up the earlier brand commitment definition by Amine (1998). As brand commitment implies that the brand is perceived as the best choice compared to other brands, it is comprehensible that high brand commitment increases consumers' willingness to purchase the brand.

Du, Bhattacharya and Sen (2007) support the finding that trust resulting from CSR is a determinant of purchase (intentions). Yet, in their study, trust resulted from participation on a CSR initiative and not from CSR messages. This might hint at a similar effect of theoretical experience of CSR (by means of CSR messages) and practical experience of CSR (by means of participation in CSR initiatives). This is an interesting proposition which could be the initial point of a new research.

The negative influence of extrinsic CSR motives on indicated purchase intentions is perhaps one of the factors which led earlier investigations come to the conclusion that CSR communication sent out by organizations themselves results into negative consumer responses. In contrast to Du et al. (2010) and Forehand and Grier (2003) who state that consumers accept extrinsic motives to some degree, the current observations rather stress that extrinsic CSR motives are not accepted at all. Further investigations could offer support for this statement, which might also be dependent on the

sample. This research included a broader audience than for example Forehand and Grier's investigations (2003) where only students were included.

In summary, the research question whether CSR message features influence positive consumer attitudes towards CSR messages and the brands behind the messages can be answered by stating that for the observed research context, CSR motives, CSR-brand fit, CSR target and CSR message specificity appear to have at least partial effects on the investigated attitudes. In general the research question can therefore be answered positively, but only cautiously as the results apply to a very distinct context which might differ for other (high involvement) brands. However, the research at hand contributes to the academic literature in the field of CSR communication and consumer-brand relationships a new perspective on the CSR communication dilemma. In addition to that, the cross-sectional approach, meaning the inclusion of five different brands, allowed for more valid statements regarding the effect of CSR message features than prior studies that mainly concentrate on one brand.

The CSR communication dilemma was challenged by examining consumer attitudes towards CSR messages that were clearly created by the organizations themselves. According to well-known and frequently cited models (Du et al., 2010; Morsing, 2003; Morsing & Schultz, 2006) such communication which is not written by an independent source but the CSR-providing brand itself would create skepticism and negative responses among consumers. This research does not only contradict such assumptions, but it also leads to the conclusion that communicating personally about one's CSR initiatives, efforts and strategies might not be the source of consumer skepticism or low credibility.

The observed preference for intrinsic CSR motives, high CSR-brand fit, CSR message specificity and to some degree for local CSR targets supports earlier findings who assumed positive consumer perceptions resulting from these features. Yet, this research goes further as a net of all these features was tested for its simultaneous effect on a variety of consumer attitudes. This complex approach demonstrates that multiple factors indeed influence the effect of CSR communication, which should be considered in future researches.

It is therefore finally argued that success or failure of CSR communication is not determined by the message sending instance (the brand itself or an independent source), but that it depends on the combination and composition of different CSR features and consumer attitudes. This conclusion leads to the refusal of future linear models, but suggests a more interactive set-up, where consumer attitudes, CSR strategy components and the information density of the CSR message are connected to each other in multiple ways.

H. Recommendations

Arising from the previously discussed results, it is recommended to take the importance of message specificity, CSR-brand fit and CSR motives into consideration when formulating CSR strategies and subsequent CSR messages. Brand managers, (CSR) communication specialists and others with responsibility for CSR communication should carefully consider three categories of influence on successful CSR communication.

a) **The general CSR approach and set-up.** Questions arising from this research which have to be considered before a direction on CSR is chosen, are the following:
   - Which local target could benefit from the CSR initiative?
   - Which CSR effort would be based on intrinsic, core brand values?
   - Which CSR initiative would fit the brand and its image?

b) **The CSR message reporting style**. Specific criteria should accompany the formulation of CSR messages in order to achieve high message specificity:
   - Is the content specific?
   - Is the content verifiable due to facts?
   - Is the content explanatory?

Consideration of these factors and questions is suggested to create, among others, CSR message credibility and brand trust among consumers. Apparently, CSR messages must communicate intrinsic motives in a way that is perceived as being specific. In order to achieve credibility it is not enough to present a CSR effort to be part of the whole business strategy as prior investigations implicate (Pirsch et al., 2007). Consumers must rather be able to see a real connection between the CSR initiative and motives of the brand but they do also need to find verifiable facts for this connection in the message.

To achieve high perceptions of CSR message specificity, CSR-brand fit and intrinsic CSR motives it is therefore advised to include consumers prior to the final selection of an approach to CSR, and before the formulation and publishing of CSR messages on a brand's website. The suggested approach is comparable to Morsing and Schultz's (2006) *stakeholder involvement strategy* in corporate social responsibility communication, which aims at the equal, interactive participation of commercial entities and their stakeholders in the development of CSR messages. Yet, Morsing and Schultz do not explicitly name CSR communication specificity as one important factor for the creation of trustworthy CSR communication. Even *stakeholder involvement strategy* does not allow for a perfect CSR communication set-up in terms of the presented content. By means of accurate and

explicit reporting, message credibility can be created among those consumers and stakeholders who were not involved in the message creation process.

In addition to that, the observed and discussed influences of CSR-brand fit, CSR motives, CSR target and CSR message specificity allow for precise objective formulations regarding the aspired effect of CSR messages in terms of consumer attitudes towards a brand. When taking the prior suggested *stakeholder involvement strategy* as the chosen approach to formulate CSR messages, the consumer attitudes towards brands tested in this research could be taken as an aspired mark. By developing CSR messages in equal cooperation with consumers it could be identified whether the observed effects of CSR message features are actually influencing the proposed consumer attitudes towards brands, and whether there are additional CSR message features which need to be considered and included. Active work with the findings of this research as explained above is expected to result into promising, effective CSR communication which can be send out to a broad community via brands' websites and other communication channels.

I. Limitations

Although practical and theoretical recommendations have been formulated based upon the findings of the research at hand, some limitations in terms of the generalizability of the results have to be pointed out. Those aspects which need to be cautiously considered when deriving findings from the research at hand are therefore presented in the following paragraphs.

It could be argued that it is not CSR message features that influence consumer attitudes towards the brand, but that attitudes towards the brand influence consumer evaluations' of the CSR messages. The academic literature provides justification for both directions. On the one hand, as participants knew the brands under study, consumers are likely to have more or less pre-established attitudes towards the brands which might have influenced their evaluation of the four CSR message features and attitudes towards the CSR message. This is the reason why it is suggested to "consider the preexisting attitudes" (Dainton & Zelley, 2011, p. 125) before messages are developed and communicated to an audience. Yet, organizations and brands are not capable of considering all potential preexisting attitudes of consumers when communicating, especially not when communicating with consumers via websites, because everyone with an Internet connection is able to read the CSR messages. What brands and organizations can do is develop CSR messages that fall in the majority of consumers' latitude of acceptance to create assimilation effects, which means to trigger consumers' pre-established attitudes in such a way that they accept the CSR message (Dainton & Zelley, 2011; Sherif, Taub & Hovland, 1958). The research at hand revealed that specific CSR message features, namely intrinsic CSR motives, high CSR-brand fit, local CSR targets and high CSR message specificity are positively associated with certain consumer attitudes. Thus, it is presumed that these CSR message particularities fall into consumers' latitudes of acceptance meeting their pre-existing attitudes towards brands and their CSR messages. It is left to future discussions whether this equals a direct influence on consumer attitudes or rather a reinforcement of them.

A suggestion for future investigations is that consumers' general attitudes towards brands could be measured before the CSR message is presented and afterwards. Such an approach allows for the comparison of pre- and post-treatment attitudes. Yet, pre-testing for brand attitudes might bias later indications of the same attitudes. It was refrained from following this approach to avoid the named bias.

In accordance with other researchers, Hamlin and Wilson (2004) hint at the lack of a common definition of CSR-brand fit, which is another limitation of this work. As no investigations delivered unanimous definitions so far, and participants of the research at hand did also not completely agree on which brands' CSR messages demonstrate high CSR-brand fit, it is assumed that the evaluation of

CSR-brand fit is subject to consumers' individual evaluation criteria which cannot be fully determined in research settings, other than by personal interviews. In this regard, the research might be biased by consumers' individual interpretations of the CSR message features. This is not only true for CSR-brand fit, but also for the perceptions of message specificity and CSR motives; they all depend on the individual criteria of every unique consumer. However, this limitation can be adduced for all attitudinal measurements and is therefore a general limitation of researches on (consumer) attitudes.

Besides, the current research is neither a complete representation of all potential CSR message features nor of all consumer attitudes which might be relevant in this context. Yet, the features and attitudes which are the most salient in the academic literature on CSR, CSR communication and brand attitudes have been selected as a starting point. Using this research as a basis allows for extensions by further or exchange against other message features and attitudes. In contrast to other studies, for instance Nan and Heo (2007), explicit consumer attitudes such as brand satisfaction were included in this research and they were tested for their relationship with specific CSR message features.

Other researchers stress that consumers do not simply differentiate between intrinsic or extrinsic (i.e. self-centered / egoistic) CSR motives, but that consumers' evaluation of brands' intentions to participate in CSR is multidimensional (Deng, 2012; Ellen et al., 2006). While Deng (2012) stresses that the positive effect of corporate intrinsic motives depends on other consumer-specific factors, such as consumer ethical awareness, Ellen et al. (2006) differentiate between self- and other-centered motives which are again separated into strategic and egoistic, value-driven and stakeholder-driven motives. There is no doubt that consumers' individual attitude towards CSR has an effect on the evaluation of CSR and CSR communication. However, organizations cannot filter who is reading their CSR messages on their websites. This justifies testing for the general perception and evaluation of specific CSR message features which are capable of generating positive responses towards the messages and brands among a diverse audience, as it has been done in this research. In response to Ellen et al. (2006), this research measured intrinsic motives by means of a scale which comes close to their extended, multidimensional scale.

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Appendix A The CSR Messages

The CSR message of Persil[13]

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[13] Henkel AG & Co. KGaA (2012). Projekt Futurino 2012. [CSR Description]. Retrieved from:
http://www.persil.de/persil-foerdert-kinder/projekt-futurino-2012.html

The CSR message of Ben & Jerry's ice cream[14]

Die Welt ein bisschen besser machen
Löffel für Löffel – Stück für Stück

Ben & Jerry's ist das vielleicht beste Eis der Welt, mit hochwertigen Zutaten, ganz außergewöhnlichen Sorten und besonders großen Stückchen. Jeder, der es einmal probiert hat, kann sich sehr gut vorstellen, dass allein der Genuss eines Bechers „Baked Alaska" oder „Chunky Monkey" die Welt schöner, rosiger und ein bisschen besser erscheinen lässt. Aber kann Eiscreme die Welt wirklich verbessern? Die Geschichte von Ben & Jerry's zeigt: Das ist tatsächlich möglich. Wie? Mit Fairtrade zertifizierter Eiscreme, klimaneutraler Produktion und Projekten wie „Caring Dairy" wird die Welt tatsächlich Schritt für Schritt – oder auch Löffel für Löffel - ein bisschen besser.

▸ **Zum Sortiment**

Einzigartiges Engagement von Ben & Jerry's

„Fairtrade bedeutet sicherzustellen, dass jeder sein Stück vom Kuchen abbekommt. Das gesamte Konzept hinter Fairtrade entspricht exakt unseren Werten und unserem Gerechtigkeitsempfinden. Es will doch niemand etwas kaufen, für dessen Herstellung jemand anderes ausgebeutet wurde", so die Meinung von Ben & Jerry's Mitbegründer Jerry Greenfield zum Thema Fairtrade.
Das **„Ben & Jerry's 100 % Fairtrade Engagement"** bedeutet, dass jede Zutat, die unter Fairtrade-Bedingungen erhältlich ist, wie Zucker oder Kakao, auch als solche bezogen wird.
Im gesamten Ben & Jerry's Portfolio werden so 121 verschiedene Stückchen und Strudel aus fair gehandelten Zutaten wie Zucker, Kakao, Bananen, Kaffee, Vanille, Mandeln und Walnüssen hergestellt.

Das **Caring Dairy Programm** hilft durch den Aufbau nachhaltiger Standards in der Milchwirtschaft, die Bedürfnisse von Menschen, Kühen, Milch und der Erde besser im Gleichgewicht zu halten. Glückliche Kühe, glückliche Milchbauern und ein glücklicher Planet für zukünftige Generationen sind unsere ultimativen Ziele!

Ben & Jerry's verringert Emissionen und investiert in CO_2-Offset Programme in Höhe von 2,4 Millionen € über 5 Jahre und macht uns damit zur **ersten weltweiten klimaneutralen Eiskrem**. Ben & Jerry's fördert dabei eine Reihe von Projekten von der Reduktion der Methanproduktion bei Kühen, bis hin zum Bau von Windkraftwerken.

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[14] Ben and Jerry's (2012). Unsere Werte – Nachhaltigkeit. [Description of Values]. Retrieved from: http://www.benjerry.de/unsere-werte/engagement-mission **Note**: The website has been updated after the research was conducted.

The CSR message of NIVEA[15]

[15] BDF (2012). NIVEA & Plan We care & connect. [Description of cooperation]. Retrieved from:
http://www.nivea.de/Unser-Unternehmen/beiersdorf/Soziale-Verantwortung/NIVEA-und-Plan

The CSR message of Dove[16]

The CSR message of Melitta[17]

Appendix B The Questionnaire

The German Version

Herzlich willkommen!

Vielen Dank für Ihre Teilnahme an dieser Studie, die ich im Rahmen meiner Masterarbeit an der University of Twente durchführe.
Im Allgemeinen geht es in dieser Studie darum die Einstellung von Konsumenten gegenüber Marken zu untersuchen, die auf ihren Websites über soziales Engagement und gesellschaftliche Verantwortung berichten.

Sie werden daher zu Beginn der Studie den Screenshot einer Website sehen, auf der eine Marke über eines ihrer sozialen Projekte berichtet. Bitte lesen Sie den Text sorgfältig durch und beantworten Sie im Nachfolgenden die Fragen hierzu. Es werden keine Daten erhoben anhand derer Sie nach der Studie identifiziert werden können - Ihre Teilnahme ist also anonym.

Ich möchte Sie bitten auf alle Fragen ehrlich zu antworten, denn auch für diese Studie gilt: es gibt keine falschen Antworten.

Insgesamt wird die Studie lediglich 15 Minuten Ihrer Zeit in Anspruch nehmen.

Vielen Dank im Voraus für Ihre Teilnahme.

Mit freundlichem Gruß,

Anna Heidinger

Bitte wählen Sie aus den fünf unten stehenden Marken eine aus, die Sie kennen und schon einmal gekauft oder genutzt haben. • Ben & Jerry's • Persil • Melitta • Dove • NIVEA • Ich habe bisher noch keine dieser Marken genutzt.
Bitte lesen Sie den unten stehenden Website-Text sorgfältig durch. Im Anschluss bewerten Sie bitte inwieweit Sie den Aussagen über die im Text genannte Marke und über den Inhalt der Website zustimmen.
Marke XY engagiert sich unter anderem für... • Fairtrade und die Verringerung von Kohlenstoffdioxid-Emissionen. • das Recht von Grundbildung für Kinder. • das Elterntelefon der Region in der die Marke ansässig ist. • gesunde Ernährung und Bewegung von Kindern. • die Stärkung des Selbstwertgefühls von Kindern und Jugendlichen.
Bitte geben Sie an inwieweit Sie den unten stehenden Aussagen zustimmen. (1 = Stimme ich überhaupt nicht zu. ; 5 = Stimme ich voll und ganz zu.)

CSR Motive (note by the author)	1	2	3	4	5
Ich glaube, dass als diese Marke entstand die Bedürfnisse der Konsumenten von Anfang an berücksichtigt wurden.					
Das in dem Text beschriebene Engagement der Marke übertrifft meine Erwartungen in Bezug auf soziale Verantwortung, die ich an eine Marke stelle.					

Ich glaube, dass das hier beschriebene Engagement aus der tiefen Überzeugung der Marke hervorgeht und nicht aus sozialer Verpflichtung.					
Ich denke, dass das hier beschriebene soziale Engagement gut ist, aber wahrscheinlich soll es bloß Verkäufe ankurbeln und Gewinne erzeugen. (R)					
Für mich sieht es so aus, als würde die Marke sich nur sozial engagieren, weil sie das Gefühl hat so handeln zu müssen. (R)					

CSR-Brand Fit

Ich denke, dass die hier beschriebene Initiative eine gute Übereinstimmung zwischen der Marke und dem Initiative darstellt.					
Ich denke, dass das beschriebene Engagement für die Marke angemessen ist.					
Ich denke, dass das beschriebene Engagement zum Image der Marke passt.					
Ich denke, dass das beschriebene Engagement eine logische soziale Aktivität für diese Marke ist.					

CSR Target

Diese Marke versucht das Leben lokaler Leute zu verbessern.					
Diese Marke strebt eine Verbesserung des sozialen Umfeldes seiner Niederlassungen an.					
Diese Marke versucht Verantwortung auf globaler Ebene zu übernehmen. (R)					
Diese Marke engagiert sich für einen Zweck der für Menschen wichtig ist, die geografisch gesehen weit weg von mir sind. (R)					
Ich denke, dass durch das soziale Engagement dieser Marke ein eher globales als ein lokales Problem angegangen werden soll.					

CSR Message Specificity

Der Text enthält spezifische Angaben, die nacheisbar sind.					
Der Text enthält Fakten darüber wie der Beitrag der Marke genau aussieht.					
Der Inhalt des Textes ist eher vage als genau. (R)					
Das Engagement der Marke und deren Beitrag wird objektiv beschrieben.					

CSR Message Credibility

Der Text ist glaubwürdig.					
Der Text ist akkurat.					
Der Text ist vertrauenswürdig.					
Der Text ist einseitig geschrieben.					

Skepticism

Ich denke, dass der Text dazu gedacht ist über etwas hinwegzutäuschen als dazu Konsumenten zu informieren.					
Ich glaube diesem Text nicht.					
Ich glaube, dass in diesem Text übertrieben wird.					
Ich glaube, dass dieser Text der Wahrheit entspricht. (R)					

Brand Satisfaction

Ich bin glücklich über meine Entscheidung diese Marke zu kaufen.					
Ich glaube, dass ich das Richtige tat als ich diese Marke kaufte.					
Im Allgemeinen, bin ich mit der Entscheidung zufrieden, wenn ich diese Marke kaufe.					
Ich bin mit den Produkten dieser Marke zufrieden.					

Brand Loyalty

Ich liebe es diese Marke zu kaufen.					

Ich bin bereit einen höheren Preis für diese als für andere Marken zu bezahlen.					
Ich werde keine andere Marke kaufen, wenn diese hier im Laden nicht verfügbar ist.					
Ich sehe mich selbst als loyal gegenüber dieser Marke an.					

Brand Trust

Diese Marke ist sicher.					
Dies ist eine ehrliche Marke.					
Ich verlasse mich auf diese Marke.					
Ich vertraue dieser Marke.					

Brand Identification

Diese Marke zu kaufen ist mir wichtig.					
Es wäre schwierig mein Vertrauen in diese Marke zu ändern.					
Ich fühle eine starke Form der Identifikation mit dieser Marke.					
Ich erkenne mich in dieser Marke wieder.					

Purchase Intention

Ich habe vor Produkte dieser Marke zu kaufen.					
Das nächste Mal, wenn ich ein Produkt dieser Kategorie benötige, werde ich die genannte Marke kaufen.					
Ich würde Produkte dieser Marke wieder kaufen.					

Wie alt sind Sie?				
Welchem Geschlecht gehören Sie an?	Männlich		Weiblich	
Was ist Ihr höchster Bildungsabschluss?	Mittlere Reife		Allgemeine Hochschulreife	
	Universitätsabschluss		Ich möchte diese Frage nicht beantworten.	
	Fachhochschulabschluss		Abgeschlossene Berufsausbildung	
	Keiner der hier aufgeführten Abschlüsse		Kein Abschluss	

The English Master

Dear participant,
Thank you very much for participating in this study which will take you only 15 minutes.
You will see a screenshot of a website of a given brand describing this brand's social engagement.
Please read the text carefully. Afterwards some questions will follow about the message, the brand and about your gender and age.
Of course, participation in this research is anonymous.
The questionnaire will start right after you click "continue".
Best regards,
Anna Heidinger

Please read the following statements and indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with it.

	I strongly disagree				I strongly agree
CSR Motive	1	2	3	4	5
I think that this brand truly cares about the things it advocates for in this message.					
I think that this brand takes every opportunity it has to benefit society, not just itself.					

I believe that this brand was built with the needs of its stakeholders in mind from the beginning.					
This brand's effort described in the message goes beyond my expectations of what a brand needs to do to be socially responsible.					
I believe that the effort described in the message stems from this brand's beliefs not from social obligation.					
I think that the social initiative described on the website is a good one, but it is not rooted in the brand's overall business strategy.					
It seems to me that this brand engaged in the described CSR effort because it feels it has to do so.					
CSR-Brand Fit					
I think that the initiative described in the message represents a good match between the brand and the cause.					
I think that the engagement described in the message is appropriate for this brand.					
I think that the engagement described in the message fits the image of the brand.					
I think that the engagement described in the message is a logical social activity for this brand.					
CSR Target					
This brand tries to improve the lives of local people.					
This brand strives to improve the social environment next to its facilities.					
This brand tries to take responsibility on a global level.					
This brand engages in a cause which is important to people all over the world.					
CSR Message Specificity					
The message contains specific indications that are verifiable.					
The message contains facts about what exactly the brand's contributions are.					
The message does not contain detailed information about what exactly the brand's contribution to the cause looks like.					
The brand's engagement and contribution is described in an objective manner.					
CSR Message Credibility					
The message is believable.					
The message is accurate.					
The message is trustworthy.					
The message is not biased.					
Skepticism					
I think that the message is intended to mislead rather than to inform consumers.					
I do not believe this message.					
I think that this message exaggerates.					
I believe that this message is true. (R)					
Brand Satisfaction					
I am happy about my decision to purchase this brand.					
I believe I did the right thing when I purchased this brand.					
Overall, I am satisfied with the decision to purchase this brand.					

I am satisfied with this brand's products.					
I am satisfied with this brand in general.					
Brand Loyalty					
No other brand in this sector has better quality than this brand.					
I love buying this brand.					
I consider this brand to be my first purchasing choice.					
I will not buy other brands if this brand is available at the store.					
I consider myself to be loyal to this brand.					
Brand Trust					
This brand's products are of a constant quality level.					
This brand will offer me new products I may need.					
This brand will be interested in my satisfaction.					
This brand will help me to solve any problem I could have with the product.					
I trust this brand.					
Brand Identification					
I consider myself to be a loyal customer of this brand.					
Buying this brand is important to me.					
It would be difficult to change my belief about this brand.					
I feel a strong sense of identification with this brand.					
Purchase Intention					
I intent to buy products from this brand.					
The next time I need a product of this category, I'll buy it from this brand.					
I would buy products from this brand.					
How old are you?					
What is your gender?					
What is your highest educational level?					