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Consumers' Reaction to CSR Information Source with Individual

Ethical Orientation Acting as a Moderator: A Mixed Method Study

among Portuguese Millennials

Sarah Sabine Duft - # 3440

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Joana Story

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Abstract

The present research identifies unexplored contextual stimuli for which CSR messages result in a favorable or rather unfavorable attitudinal outcome among Portuguese Millennial consumers. Conducting a mixed method study, the CSR stimuli *Information Source*, was determined in qualitative interviews and examined on its effect in a sequential experimental study. Communicating about CSR affected consumers' *Attitude Towards a Company* positively when information came from independent sources and backfired when information was initiated by a company itself, reinforced negatively respectively by a third-party cooperation. Moderation analysis confirmed that high levels of *Individual Ethical Orientation* had a more positive effect on attitude formation.

Keyword: CSR Communication, Information Source, Consumer Attitude, Individual Ethical Orientation

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Introduction

"By January 2018, all canned tuna sold at Whole Foods Market will meet rigorous sustainability and traceability requirements that aim to reduce overfishing and bycatch, and support fishing communities. Whole Foods Market is the first national retailer to create such stringent standards for canned tuna, which is among the three most consumed seafood items in the United States." (Whole Foods Market Corporate Website, 2017)

Nowadays, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is gaining importance in various marketplaces all over the globe. Firms are increasingly stressing their effort in engaging in socially, economically and ecologically responsible practices. Moreover, they are accepting responsibility not only for their business activities but also for its social and environmental consequences. (Tata and Prasad, 2015)

Besides the considerable increased importance of initializing CSR activities, communication on these has become a vital part. Businesses, corporations and organizations of all kinds are increasingly prompted to explain what they do and why they do it to an incremental vocal and educated group of stakeholders who are conscious of their rights as well as the obligation of businesses (Tench, Sun and Jones, 2014). Whole Food Market's quotation at the outset of this paper is an example of CSR communication. For many years the company has been a forerunner in stressing the importance of preserving the nature for future generations (Bahr Thompson, 2017).

According to Vermillion and Peart (2010) it is especially the generational group of Millennials who are highly environmentally and socially conscious and who are seeking businesses to increase their engagement in CSR efforts. In the context of the age group Millennials, also known as Generation Y, it has to be noted that there is no conformity on the cut-off dates. However, in this study and in accordance with Donnison (2007) Millennials are specified as born during the mid 1980s and early 2000s. This generational group is often

considered as being highly versatile, well educated, technically skilled (Hood, 2012) and increasingly worried about long-term effects on communities, the environment and their own health (Spehar, 2006). Fromm and Garton (2013) argue that Millennials differ from their core values to disparate types of expression thus the way they need to be communicated and marketed at fundamentally differs to other generations. Additionally, the communication outreach might be more effective if reflecting that Millennials are deemed to care about the environment they live in and may not retreat from striving to improve it (Aidhi, 2015). This study aims to contribute to literature by shedding light on CSR communication towards Millennials, their perception and respective responses to certain stimuli. It investigates on this concrete age category as past research has mainly concentrated on cross-generational groups and the study will give way for more effective ways to communicate to this specific target audience. Extending this work to consumer behavior, the author tries to understand Millennial attitudinal outcomes to certain CSR communication strategies. In this relation, a mixed method study will focus on both identifying stimuli underlying consumers attitudes and providing useful data for explaining and interpreting the identified results and its effects.

Extant research has specifically investigated on the stimulus "CSR message" to a high extent. Studies exploring CSR messages are addressing various issues, for instance, statements containing various types CSR causes (Forehand and Grier, 2003), different framing of CSR messages (Wang, 2007), inconsistent CSR messages (Wagner, Lutz and Weitz, 2009), and the effect of positively versus negatively constructed CSR messages (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001). However, Yoon, Canli and Schwarz (2006) state that, besides the message, consumer systematically process other contextual information to determine a company's true motive. Consequently, the main goal of this study is to provide an explanation of unexplored stimuli for which CSR messages result in a rather favorable or unfavorable attitudinal outcome among consumers. Those circumstances, here referred to as contextual CSR stimuli, need to be

explored and identified by conducting qualitative interviews with Millennials about their perception, attitude and response towards CSR communication. In a further step, quantitative research examines how the identified stimuli are having a different impact on consumers' responses, precisely Attitude Towards the Company, and whether the individual-specific indicator Individual Ethical Orientation acts as a moderator in this study. The latter is of particular importance as ones' individual ethical sentiments might determine the effect of CSR communication and might be a factor taken into account for effective market segmentation.

Additionally, it is the aim of this study to add to scarce research on CSR in Portugal by providing new empirical data on Portuguese consumers' response to CSR communication. According to Neves and Bento (2005) the dispersion of CSR in Portugal is described as being still at an early stage. The authors state that one reason for this might be the Portuguese government's passive stance and insufficient priority towards CSR. Yet, the situation seems to be changing due to a group of events (Neves and Bento, 2005). It was after the European Lisbon Conference of 2000 that CSR started to be used systematically, due to the approval of the Lisbon Agenda 2010, a strategic approach for renewing economic, social and environmental structures (Fernandes et al., 2013). Not only in Portugal but in other peripheral countries, companies' role in society has grown and there is a rising expectation to anticipate to changing demands of various stakeholders (e.g. consumers, citizens, governments and others) (Proença and Branco, 2014). Being one of the few studies, this research provides deeper insights on CSR communication in Portugal and it seeks to determine tactics how CSR communicators can enhance the manner of exchanging information with Portuguese Millennial consumers.

Method

Research Design

The current paper was designed to investigate on Millennials' perception of and response to certain CSR communication stimuli in Portugal. In this context, a two-phase mixed method study was conducted where qualitative and quantitative research methods were involved to gather and analyze data (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). Qualitative content analysis served as an interpretation method for the qualitative interviews, however this method appears to be insufficient to grasp a consumer's inner drive to form their attitudes towards CSR initiatives (Men and Tsai, 2013). Thus, a sequential research approach was designed, where the second study as an experimental study contributes to literature by analyzing a set of data to extend the knowledge on consumers' attitudinal responses.

Qualitative Research

Methodology. For the present research, the exploratory stage's goal is to develop on the contextual triggers and manipulations. The collected data was used in the subsequent phase to alter the CSR communication environment. In this sense, a qualitative study was conducted to get an initial understanding of CSR communication in Portugal and to identify stimuli to form a coherent research construct. The interviews, conducted with Portuguese Millennials in English, were semi-structured as this technique unveils new topics and quests for knowledge in regard to questions related to the topic CSR communication. Moreover, it gives the possibility to collect a detailed and rich amount of data. (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009).

The interviews were conducted virtually via the tool Skype as new technology platforms create the possibility to expand the scope of qualitative research to the online area (Kontio, Lehtola and Bragge, 2004). As mentioned earlier Millennials are highly affine to the Internet and they often lack time (Fromm and Garton, 2013). Mark Prensky (2001) characterizes them as digital natives as they grew up in an environment marked by rapid advancement in

technology and devices. As a result, the use of Video calls as an online communication tool to conduct interviews (Kontio, Lehtola and Bragge, 2004) seemed to be suited for this study out of cost, time and convenience reasons. One cannot neglect that there are some difficulties as constraints relating to observation and participation of the interviewee as well as constraints caused by technical issues, and deficient non-verbal communication input (Hughes and Lang, 2004). Still, this technique was regarded to be highly suitable for the present research.

Relistening was ensured by audio recording of interviews which enhances an objective analysis and creates the possibility to use direct quotes. As a first step, data was parted and scrutinized by the line. (Strauss and Corbin, 2008) Secondly, to identify statements that allow to understand Millennials perception on CSR communication, open coding was carried out. In respect to further data analysis Gioia, Corley and Hamilton (2013) recommend a thematic analysis of verbatim transcript to determine the first order categories. Axial coding contrasted first level codes to determine differences and similarities which afterwards classified the second order themes (Strauss and Corbin, 2008). Lastly, to group the themes more notionally into conceptual categories, theoretical dimensions were identified (Locke, 2001).

In relation to the sampling process, it is the aim to achieve variation in the description of attitudes and behaviors (Hughes and Lang, 2004). Sampling was pursued until theoretical saturation occurred and no more relevant data seemed to emerge on the part of the interviewees. The present sample included 14 participants of which seven were female and seven were male. The sample's mean age overall was 24 years. Four participants were born between 1980-1990 and ten were born between 1990-1999. In total, nine interviewees study/ied at university level.

Results. Owing to the abundant quality of data gathered in the interviews, several categories and themes appeared (see Appendix A). Due to the limited scope of this research one rather unexplored theme out of the category of interest "CSR Communication Stimuli" was chosen, namely "Information Source". As described in the former, most research concentrates

on the CSR activity and message itself, only a marginal amount focuses on the source. Other themes that emerged from the interviews were not further researched as they were regarded to be: unspecific to this study (i.e. Portuguese History and Political System), too difficult to operationalize for the scope of this research (i.e. Companies Individual CSR Strategy), too small (i.e. Company Origin) or extensively researched such as proactive vs. reactive CSR strategy (e.g. Wagner, Lutz and Weitz, 2009; Cheong, Sinnakkannu and Ramasamy, 2017).

In this context, it has to be noted that the result might be biased due to the fact that the sample included relatively more students. According to Roach and Slater (2016) it is more likely that enrolled students or university absolvents exhibit high levels in terms of CSR awareness compared to non-students. The qualitative interviews gave highly valuable insights to form a coherent construct however there was the need to deeper understand the importance of Information Source as a stimulus and its impact on consumers' response within the context of CSR communication. Consequently, the evaluation of whether specific factors are predictors of a response was seen to be most suitable for quantitative research (Creswell, 2012).

Literature Review and Development of Hypotheses

Menor and Roth (2007) stress that proficient measurement and development of scale is a precondition for conducting sophisticated empirical science. Nevertheless, prior to this it is vital to develop on the concept by defining the theoretically significant constructs. Therefore, to prepare for the second phase of this research a review of literature was necessary.

Attitude Towards the Company. The term "attitude" was initially mentioned in the field of psychology in the early 60's. The term described, at this stage, an internal state of mind in terms of willingness to execute a function or task. (Cacioppo, Petty and Crites, 1994) This is in line with Picken (2005) who argued that the term attitude, simply put, is an individual's mindset to take actions in a specified way, strongly depending on the individual's personality and experiences. Within the present context, in accordance with Kordnaeij, Askaripoor and

Bakhshizadeh (2013), the formation of an attitude constitutes of a person's favorable or unfavorable feeling about an activity. Additionally, it is a sense that indicates the overall evaluation of a certain concept and a human's tendency towards or against it. In respect to social psychology concepts, researchers in the field of Marketing have investigated on the question whether there is a relation between attitude and behavior. There is a high degree of conformity on the theory that, first there is an attitude and then behavior is formed subsequently. Therefore, attitude can take a crucial position as it could be used to predict related behavioral outcomes. (Arjun, 1999) In relation to this, previous research has revealed that consumers' Attitude Towards a Company has an effect on their actual purchase patterns in the market place (Wagner, Lutz and Weitz, 2009; Pan and Zinkhan, 2006; Lichtenstein, Drumwright and Braig, 2004). In respect to the present study, it is of high importance to investigate on consumers' attitudinal reactions triggered by a CSR message from different information sources. This is to find out about sources' effectiveness in forming positive tendencies towards a company which in turn, could result in a favorable behavioral outcome. Despite various research efforts on CSR effecting Attitude Towards a Company (e.g. Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001; Yoon, Canli and Schwarz, 2006) this study contributes to literature as no previous research has investigated on this dependent variable in the context with the author's identified CSR stimuli, nor with Individual Ethical Orientation, described in the later, as a moderator. Moreover, no research exists that has analyzed those effects either for a specific generation group or for the Portuguese population. Again, this is a crucial point to be considered in order to provide specifically targeted communication strategies and therefore a more effective way to communicate towards a group who increasingly favors transparent businesses with clear commitment towards society.

Information Source. Source, as contextual stimulus, is one factors that might influence consumers' credibility towards a message. Alike other messages in the context of Marketing, CSR messages are not only assessed on their respective content but also on the Information

Source (Yoon, Canli and Schwarz, 2006). An Information Source is defined as the originator of communication or the sender (Shannon, 2001). Consumers are exposed to various types of sources. Within this context they are divided into two segments as CSR communication originating from the (1) company source or from an (2) independent source. First, relating to the company source, information could either be published by firms itself or by a third party. Published by a company itself can take several manifestations: advertisement in TV or print, statements on product packaging, and advertisement emphasizing on the overall company such as corporate advertising. In addition, it comprises claims made online as e.g. on the company websites or on social media. However, some forms of CSR communication are dependent on third-party sources where messages are still constructed by the firm but published by another party. Cooperations are often entered into out of credibility reasons and because of the way information is presented. Examples include, besides others, cooperation with charity partners or other companies and forms of paid PR such as, for instance, fee-based partnerships with bloggers. (Berens and Popma, 2014)

Secondly, there is CSR information constructed and verified by independent news media sources. Those are widely referred to as unbiased third-party sources and include e.g. specialty publications like journals or independent organizations and other publishers that provide information on CSR. Research by Carrigan, Szmigin and Wright (2004) found that the source of information from which people become aware of CSR issues is mostly independent media. Similarly, Mohr, Webb and Harris (2001) provided useful guidance as they interviewed consumers in respect to their CSR information preferences and came to the conclusion that respondents preferred information that is objective. A study by Simmons and Becker-Olsen (2006), within the context of CSR sponsorship, revealed that message from a non-profit source, compared to a corporate source, made respondents less skeptical about low-fit sponsorship which affirms the effectiveness of unbiased sources in terms of credibility. However, a negative

consequence that arises is based on the fact that companies in this case may not be able to control and steer this kind of information. Furthermore, consumers might often see this as merely a PR devise from a company as for instance news items based on official press announcements might be seen as rather biased in nature. (Berens and Popma, 2014) Still, the benefits seem to be dominant as this Information Source can be seen as the most "credible kind" (Berens and Popma, 2014; Morsing and Schulz, 2006; Pomering and Dolnicar, 2009). What all mentioned papers in this paragraph, besides the one by Simmons and Becker-Olsen (2006), have in common is the exploratory research design as none of them further investigated on the effect of source on consumers' attitudinal or behavioral responses.

In line with previous research, also the interviews in the present study (see Appendix A for verbatim extracts) found that there was the tendency that participants mentioned to have a more positive evaluation of a company if they learn about CSR activities from an unbiased source. Derived from this, hypothesizes are set up in order to be able to test them and provide statistical evidence (see figure 1 for the research construct).

Hypothesis 1: Exposure to a message from an independent source will have a more positive effect on Millennial consumers' Attitude Towards a Company than exposure to the same message from a company initiated source.

Figure 1 A Conceptual Model for the Present Study
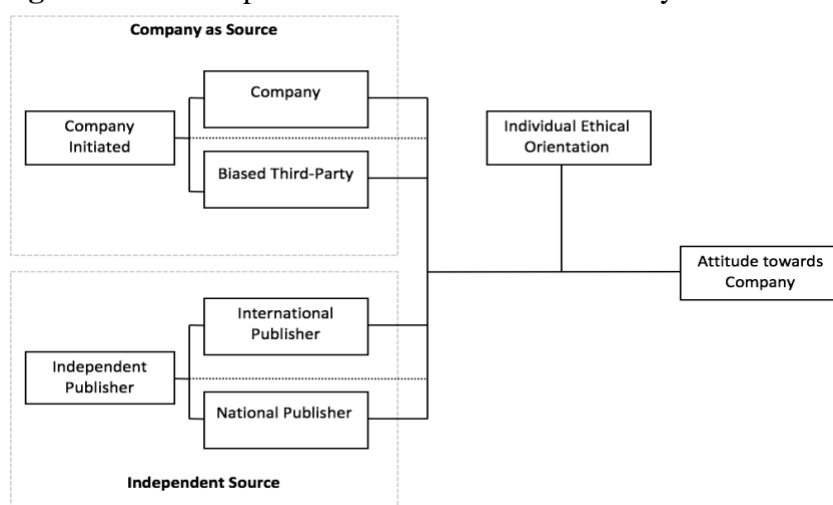
Source: Own presentation

On a second level, within the independent variable company source there are two different types of sources, the company itself and a biased third-party. As mentioned above companies are cooperating with third parties, to send out "more credible information" which might have a positive outcome in consumers' Attitude Towards a Company.

Hypothesis 2: Exposure to a message from a biased third-party source will have a more positive effect on Millennial consumers' Attitude Towards a Company than exposure to the same message from the company itself.

Similarly, within the variable Independent Source, is a second level of variables. Some interviewees mentioned that they would rather like receiving a CSR message from an international publisher than from a national publisher (see Appendix A for verbatim extract). This topic was initially brought forward by Gaziano and McGrath (1986) who found out that the credibility of media sources significantly increased as the focus moved from local to state to national to international. Moreover, participants evaluation in regards of overall reliability, reporting quality and coverage of controversial issues scored higher for international media especially for daily newspaper publisher (Gaziano and McGrath, 1986). Consequently, the origin of the publisher might have an effect on Millennials' responses.

Hypothesis 3: Exposure to a message from an international source will have a more positive effect on Millennial consumers' Attitude Towards a Company than exposure to the same message from a national source.

Individual Ethical Orientation. As everyone has different levels of ethical orientations we cannot generalize consumer ethics as a whole (Shim, Chung and Kim, 2017). Perceptions towards businesses' CSR activities might be varying as a result of individuals' ethical judgement of the motives behind it. Depending on the ethical orientation, consumer differ in their endorsement of and receptiveness of CSR effort, as there are e.g. persons who don't believe in the concept of CSR, presuming that a companies' sole purpose is to maximize

shareholder profit. However, there are others who believe that businesses must recognize their role in society and support changes in larger social and environmental issues. The latter are usually CSR advocates or more extremely referred to as activists. (Cone, 2008) Nevertheless, there are consumers in between this two extremes. This is supported by Sharp (1898) who argues that people are coming up with quite different assessments of moral issues as they incorporate different views on what is the "true virtue" of ethics (Shim, Chung and Kim, 2017).

Studies have elucidated existing beliefs and knowledge for individual characteristics that may moderate behavioral outcomes in CSR communication (Shim, Chung and Kim, 2017). Du et al. (2010) examined the variable "social value orientation" on its effectiveness concerning CSR communication and its relation to stakeholders' motivation to process CSR information. However, more attention has to be granted to audience traits that might moderate the perception of CSR and essential attitudinal behavior (Shim, Chung and Kim, 2017). Therefore, to have a clear understanding of the extent to which audience-level factors affect the likelihood to form a positive attitude, the moderating variable Individual Ethical Orientation is introduced.

Hypothesis 4: The relationship between Information Source and Millennial consumers' Attitude Towards a Company will be moderated by Individual Ethical Orientation.

Quantitative Study

Method. It is the goal of the subsequent study to further investigate on the stimuli "Information Source" and its effect on an attitudinal outcome that might shed light on the issue why humans' response varies in relation to companies operating in the identical industry, supporting relatively similar CSR initiatives and conveying equal CSR messages. To be more precise**,** this research examines the effect of a message from four different sources on subjects' company evaluation, using a 2x (CSR message Company Initiated: Company Itself and Biased Third-Party) 2 (CSR message from Independent Source: National and International Source) between-subjects design. Furthermore, a control group is added to serve as comparison group

for the evaluation of results. To make it clear, the present author will focus on Information Sources' direct influence on consumers' Attitude Towards a Company and its dependence on the key moderator Individual Ethical Orientation.

Methodology.

Constructing the Industry. A company's image is tightly intertwined with the "environmental legitimacy" of an industry and reputation of a firm is often closely tied to its industry. This applies especially for businesses playing an active part in sensitive industries, where negative external effects on the environment pertain to the daily business. Tourist, power generation, and other severe polluting industries are examples of an inherent part of such industries. (Amores-Salvado, de Castro and Navas-Lopez, 2014; Hunter and Bansal, 2006)

Many companies in the natural cosmetic industry can be categorized as CSR forerunners and have added an eco-friendly and ethical dimension early on (Girotto, 2013). It has to be noted that it is especially younger Millennials who are driving the trend of natural and organic cosmetics due to their concern primarily about their health but also about the products' environmental impact (Rina, 2017). This fact is supported by Soyoung and Yoo-Kyoung (2009) who state that young consumers are already familiar with the principles of natural ingredients and research controversial ones online. The authors mention that this kind of consumers are affine, especially in respect to the beauty industry, for more sustainable brands and products. This was evidenced by a study on environmental consciousness and its importance placed on cosmetic products by Soyoung and Yoo-Kyoung 2009. Hence, in the present case, a relatively low sensitive industry was chosen, namely the natural and organic cosmetic industry, in order not to have any negative external effect on consumers' attitude formation. This study makes use of a considerably good green corporate image because of the nature of this industry as well as of green certification schemes, ethical labels, green materials and sustainable packaging

which serve as indicators of a businesses' environmental engagement. (Amores-Salvado, de Castro and Navas-Lopez, 2014)

Constructing the Message. This study aims to construct a message that will arouse an initial CSR belief and not any skepticism in terms of trustworthiness and sincerity. This is to be able to test whether there are differences in the positivity of effects in regard to Information Source on essential attitudinal outcome. Taking into account guiding insights about the communication environment described above, it is crucial to set up suitable messages that are consistent with the context to ensure valid results. To maintain task realism, the CSR message's information was obtained from an actual business which is being recognized for its longstanding proactive and effective CSR strategy. Moreover, the company stresses that green issues are taken seriously (see Appendix C for the CSR statement adapted from The Weleda Group and Weleda AG, 2016). According to Wagner, Lutz and Weitz (2009) a positive CSR statement will create a favorable initial belief about the companies' activities and initiatives. The present company, having a respectively positive CSR record, was made a fictive company to prevent any reputational or image-promotional bias.

CSR initiatives and respective communication vary from distinct areas such as ethical responsibility, community well-being, operational business expectations or legal obligations (Uzunoğlu, Türkel and Akyar, 2017). According to Forehand and Grier (2003) the type of cause a company supports has an impact on peoples' reaction e.g. increasing or decreasing skepticism towards the company. To decrease message skepticism CSR domain activities, like (1) environmental effort and (2) diversity, where consumers support is more likely (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001), enabled the present author to operationalize the CSR construct meaningfully. The chosen company Weleda stresses the importance of these domains by putting a vast emphasis on ethical sourcing to keep the natural eco-system and biodiversity intact, and also focusing heavily on the promotion of equal, respectful and diverse workplaces.

The present company as well as its natural cosmetic product are positioned as environmental friendly as this creates message congruency and is, according to Keller and Aaker (1996), enhancing the company's overall appearance due to the fact that both, CSR information about the company and product are reinforcing each other. Moreover, Du et al. (2010) recommend emphasizing the fit of CSR activities, as in case of a low fit initiative, a businesses' extrinsic motives are likely to be more salient which in turn affects behavioral outcome negatively. Consequently, to elicits a positive outcome, this study includes a company which is aware of its negative impact on natural resources and which uses high-fit activities to highlight its environmental effort and to counteract the negative consequences of its actions.

Constructing the Medium. With respect to CSR communication, it is of importance to enunciate the medium though which the message is transmitted (Uzunoğlu, Türkel and Akyar, 2017). From the qualitative interviews a tendency that Millennials make highly use of online channels could be surmised (see Appendix B for verbatim extract). As qualitative research is prone to subjectivity, due to not comprising any statistical analyses or calculations, the validity of the hypothesis is called into question (Brink, 1993). However, it is evidenced by numerous other studies that this generational group uses online media more often than other age groups (Fromm and Garton, 2013). Leveraging on social media is critical to Millennials as a result of their high dependency on this channel to get and share information. If they are able to associate with a CSR initiative or message they are likely to spread the word on social platforms like Facebook and Twitter. (Aidhi, 2015) It is becoming apparent that recent literature increasingly focuses on social media as communication tool for CSR (e.g. Uzunoğlu, Türkel and Akyar, 2017; Kent and Taylor, 2016; Dutot, Galvez and Versailles, 2016; Abitbol and Lee, 2017). Having online media facilitating the possibility to create a communicative environment, where consumers can interact with the firm and enter into a dialogue, allows for a higher involvement and participation. Consequently, creating a favorable environment results in more effective

communication of social, economic or ecologic activities. (Kent and Taylor, 2016) Therefore, the present study will focus on CSR communication to Millennials via messages on social media as this seems to be the most natural way for information to get to this generational group (Fromm and Garton, 2013).

Stimuli Development and Sampling. Subjects were randomly allocated to one of the stimuli groups in this experiment or to a control group. All participants of the survey read the same company information (see Appendix C). The introductory statement where the information source was stated, was adapted to fit the four different stimuli. The control group received information without the introductory thus the source was not disclosed.

Questionnaire Development and Distribution. An online survey questionnaire, in English language, was utilized to collect data. Qualtrics, a web survey software, served to develop the questionnaire. Although, this kind of survey comes along with problems e.g. non-responses or measurement errors resulting from a lack of motivation or a lack of understanding (Couper, 2000), this method seemed to be appropriate for this study: Advantages like extended coverage, easy accessibility of various target groups, low costs as well as considerably shorter investigation times were prevailing (Hussy, Schreier and Echterhoff, 2013). The recruitment of participants was done by distribution of the online survey URL on social networking sites in Portugal (e.g. Portuguese university groups, alumni groups, environmentalist and sustainability groups, etc.) and emailed to students from Nova School of Business and Economics with the request to share it with family and friends.

Measures. In this study, control variables are age, gender and education. Moreover, as the stimulus and the survey were in English language, the English language proficiency was controlled for. Participants were asked to evaluate their language skills in the areas reading, oral, listening and writing on a scale 1-7. An example item includes: "How would you rate your listening English skills?" The four items were adapted from Korzilius and Arias (2016).

As manipulation check the following CSR related statements were included: (1) "The company is doing good for society" and (2) "The company is social responsible" with answering options ranging from "definitely yes" to "definitely no" on a 7-point Likert scale (adapted from Kortilius and Arias, 2016).

The dependent variable Attitude Towards a Company was adapted from Homer (1995) and Tillmann, Lutz and Weitz (2009) and consisted of a four-item scale composed of semantic differential items: favorable/unfavorable, good/bad, negative/positive and pleasant/ unpleasant. The items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale anchored by 1 i.e. favorable and 7 i.e. unfavorable.

The moderating variable Individual Ethical Orientation was assessed based on the 5-item measure adapted from Shim, Chung and Kim (2017) and Reidenbach and Robin (1988).

Preliminary Analysis and Descriptive Statistics. In order to analyze data appropriately, data processing is indispensable. A total number of 337 people responded to the online survey. Missing values which account to the proportion of at least 40% were not further processed which summed up to a total of 15 responses. (Böhler, 2004) Moreover data was cleansed by 65 answers which were not suited for further analysis as they were predominately from non-Portuguese residences but also from respondents that did not fit the generational group (>15years and <35 years). As a result, an amount of 257 surveys was used for further analysis.

In total, 33.1 % of respondents were male and correspondently 66.9 % were female. An amount of 11.3 % (N=29) of respondents were aged between 15 and 20 years, 51% (N=131) between 21 and 25 years, 27.2% (N=70) between 26 and 30 years and 10.5% (N=27) between 31-35 years. Concerning respondents' employment status it has to be noted that 44% (N=113) are employed full-time, 6.6% (N=17) half time, 46.7 % (N=119) were students and 2.7% (N=7) were people currently unemployed.

In respect to descriptive statistics, table 1 shows the significant correlation between

Individual Ethical Orientation (IEO) and Attitude Towards the Company (ATC) ($r = 0.448$; $p < 0.01$). Analyses concerning the control variables revealed no significant effects on attitude.

Table 1 Descriptive Analysis with Means, Standard Deviation and Zero-Order Correlation.

Variable	M	SD	1	2
Dependent				
1. ATC	4.98	.78	1	**.448****
Interaction				
2. IEO	5.47	.67	**.448****	1

n = 257; ** p < 0.01

Source: Own analysis

In respect to the manipulation check, an ANOVA exposed no significant main and interaction effect. Respondents assessed the firm as social responsible regardless of the Information Source.

Measurement of Properties. The most frequently applied method for assessing reliability is Cronbach's α, where a reference value of ≥0.7 (Cortina, 1993) is met in both analyses. A further criterion for reliability is the Item-To-Total Correlation (ITTC) which is also met as values are ≥0.5 (Zaichkowsky, 1985) as can be seen in table 2.

Table 2 Result of Reliability Analysis of Individual Ethical Orientation (IEO) and Attitude Towards the Company (ATC)

Item	ITTC	Cronbach's α when item is omitted	Item	ITTC	Cronbach's α when item is omitted
IEO _1	.595	.816	ATC_1	.851	.899
IEO _2	.618	.806	ATC _2	.845	.900
IEO _3	.745	.748	ATC _3	.822	.908
IEO _4	.691	.774	ATC _4	.805	.914

n = 257; α = 0.832   n = 257; α = 0.927

Source: Own Analysis

To analyze item discriminant validity an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) is performed (for results see table 3 and 4). One criteria of the EFA is the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) criteria which serves as a measure of sampling adequacy and should at least account for 0.5. (Field, 2009) which is the case for this study. Furthermore, a minimum Eigenvalue of 1.0 is met and

the explained variance accounts for at least 50% (Kaiser, 1970) for both variables analyzed. The Bartlett-Test for sphericity confirmed that data is suited for a factor analysis (for p <0.05) (Field, 2009). In the present paper, the condition for factor loading of the individual items account for ≥0.5 (Backhaus et al., 2011) which is fulfilled in all cases.

Table 3 Result of Factor Analysis for Individual Ethical Orientation (IEO)

Item	Factor loading: (IEO): 1	Commonality after extraction
IEO_1	.766	.586
IEO_2	.782	.612
IEO_3	.872	.760
IEO_4	.838	.703
Eigenvalue	2.661	
Explained Variance	66.526	

n = 257; KMO = .778; Bartlett-Test: χ^2 = 395.285, df = 6.0, p = .000
Source: Own analysis

Table 4 Result of Factor Analysis for Attitude Towards the Company (ATC)

Item	Factor loading: (ATC): 1	Commonality after extraction
ATC_1	.919	.844
ATC _2	.916	.838
ATC _3	.901	.812
ATC _4	.890	.792
Eigenvalue	3.287	
Explained Variance	82.177	

n = 257; KMO = .860; Bartlett-Test: χ^2 = 800.399, df = 6.0, p = .000
Source: Own analysis

Results

Several one-way between-subjects ANOVAs were conducted to explore significant difference between the means of information source groups (see Appendix D for results of all ANOVAs conducted). As a prerequisite for ANOVA, data was tested for normal distribution by performing a Kolmogorov-Smirnov-Test and Shapiro Wilk-Test which indicated no outliers therefore, for each group, data was found to be normally distributed (p <.05) (Lilliefors, 1967). Moreover, the Levene-Test which assumes homogeneity of variance was conducted for each

group and was at no time significant (p >.05).

Starting with an analysis of mean differences between company and independent source, there was, as expected, a significant difference between the means in this groups [F(1,203) = 20.744, p <.001]. This indicates that subjects evaluated their Attitude Towards a Company more positively when they received CSR information from an independent (M = 5.150; SD = .737) rather than from a company source (M = 4.712; SD = .771). A post-hoc test, such as the Tukey test, was not used in further analysis as fewer than three groups were compared. Crucial to highlight is the planned contrast with the control group that did not receive any information on the source. As a result, one can determine conditions under which the communication about the CSR source has a positive effect, is ineffective or backfires. Learning about CSR information initiated by the company had a backfire effect as participants' attitude was more negative (M = 4.712; SD = .771) compared to when they were not aware of the source (M = 4.965; SD = .731) [F(1,153) = 4.38, p <.05]. Inversely, the independent source had a favorable effect as attitude was more positive (M = 5.150; SD = .737) compared to the control group (M = 4.965); SD = .731) [F(1,152) = 5.630, p <.01]. These findings are consistent with *hypothesis 1*.

In a more detailed analysis for the company initiated source, subjects' evaluation on their Attitude Towards a Company were more negative when they read about CSR information from a biased third-party source (M = 4.458; SD = .575) than from the company itself (M = 4.951; SD = .875) [F(1,101) = 8,433, p <.001]. This finding is not consistent with *hypothesis 2* as information from the biased third-party source did not result in a more positive attitude compared to information from the company itself but the other way around. Moreover, receiving company information from the company itself did not change participants' Attitude Towards the Company (M = 4.951; SD = .875) relatively to the control group (M = 4.965; SD = .731) [F(1,102) = 2.148, p >.05]. However, receiving information from a biased third-party

source resulted in a more negative evaluation (M = 4.458; SD = .575) versus the control group (M = 4.965; SD = .731) [F(1,102) = 4,637, p <.01].

Unexpectedly, no differences of participants' attitude could be found when comparing the international source (M = 5.089; SD = .765) with the national source (M = 5.189; SD = .728) (F(1,101) = 2.426, p>.05). This result is not consistent with *hypothesis 3*.

Individual Ethical Orientation was statistically significant when included in the model for testing *hypothesis 4* as an interaction effect could be found [$F(1,15) = 6.212$, p <.001]. This interaction can be interpreted as Information Source has a different effect on attitude formation depending on the ethical sentiment. In further investigations, a simple slope analysis was conducted which enables to analyze the essence of the interaction effect more precisely (West, Aiken and Krull, 1996). The lower ($M - 1SD$) and higher ($M + 1SD$) regression slopes were graphed for both the independent and company source in respect to different levels of ones' ethical orientation (see Figure 2). For low levels of Individual Ethical Orientation, the moderation effect was non-existent (simple slope = .071; t = .86; p >.05) whereas the effect was significant with p = .006 for high levels (simple slope = .43; t = 5.63; p <.01).

Figure 2 Plot of Interaction Effect of Information Source (Company Source (CS) and Independent Source (IS)) and Individual Ethical Orientation (IEO) on Attitude Towards the Company (ATC)
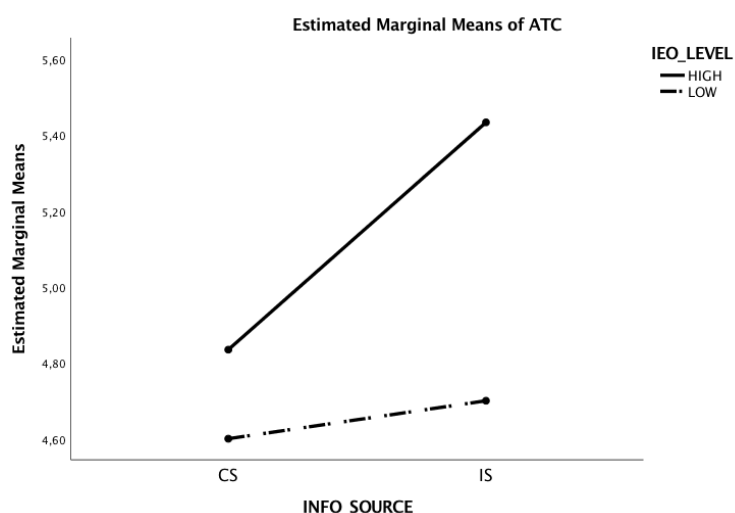
Source: Own analysis

Discussion and Conclusion

The main goal of this study was to provide useful key insights and guidelines for firms that quest to improve its CSR communication strategy for a more effective alignment of CSR information exchange with Millennials. By investigating on rather unexplored conditions under which CSR messages elicit a desired or undesired attitudinal outcome among Portuguese Millennial consumers, this study came up with wide-ranging findings, stated in the following.

The current study found that the independent source had a more positive effect on consumer outcome, concretely Attitude Towards a Company, compared to the company initiated message. One may conclude that using independent media sources for communication on CSR to some extend yields higher effects on attitudes than transmitting it via corporate sources. This result is in line with Wiener, LaForge and Goolsby (1990), Simmons and Becker-Olsen (2006) and Yoon, Canli and Schwarz (2006), who argue that independent non-corporate sources are generally perceived with a lower degree of skepticism because of their unbiased and/or less self-interested nature.

In contrast to the opinion of Berens and Popma (2014), Morsing and Schulz (2006) and Pomering and Dolnicar (2009) this study found that CSR messages initiated by a biased third-party source, more precisely by a Green blogger, had a more negative attitudinal outcome compared to messages from the company itself. One explanation might be that the number of bloggers has been accelerating in the last years on a global scale with people gaining awareness that this is an inexpensive method for firms to increase visibility and propel a brand's image. (Koskela, 2014) In addition, also Tuten and Solomon (2016) argue that there is a credibility issue arising when people are confronted with blogger cooperation, especially as soon as it is obvious that the company has paid for the partners' contribution. In this study, it was clearly stated that the firm entered into a cooperation with a blogger to endorse their CSR efforts (see Appendix C) which might has reinforced the negative effect on respondents' attitude.

The present results, provide evidence that in certain circumstances, Information Source evokes a relatively positive or negative attitudinal outcome, while in other cases, no differential effect is obvious. The latter appeared in respect to international and national source where no significant difference between the groups' mean was found. Differently from the expectation and unlike the findings of Gaziano and McGrath (1986) no effect on consumers' attitude in terms of origin of the publisher source was found. A reason for this might be related to the fact that this research has avoided reputation biases by not disclosing the source but only stating the nationality and the degree of visibility of the company (i.e. well-known Portuguese publisher). In accordance with Du et al. (2010), the author of the present study stresses that it is important to consider trustworthiness of third-party sources not as indefinite, as editorials with a poor reputation in some cases could be perceived as less trustworthy and could elicit negative behavioral outcomes. This is in line with Hornig (2017) and Fogg et al. (2003) who argue that people evaluate news on the accuracy of information but even more on the recognition of the news' source. Excepting reputational biases, the non-existent significance provides evidence that in general there is no significant difference between national and international publisher.

Some studies have already addressed the importance of individuals' characteristics in influencing attitudes. The present study found a moderating effect of Individual Ethical Orientation. This effect is implicit to prior research such as a study on ethical orientation by Shim, Chung and Kim 2017, or on relatively similar moderators such as "individual CSR support" (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001), "importance of issue to self" (Hayley, 1996), "personal relevance" (Creyer and Ross, 1997) in consumers' reaction to CSR. The interaction effect can be interpreted as that the source has a different effect on attitudes depending on ones' ethical sentiment. This reveals a more fine-grained pattern in comparison to just focusing on the difference between the effect of independent versus company source. Compared to the latter, the independent source reinforced the positive effect on Attitude Towards a Company for high

levels of ethical orientation significantly.

The present findings induce extensive theoretical as well as practical implications. Relating to the first, the applied mixed-method design adds to existing literature by providing qualitative insights on the perception of CSR communication among Millennials as well as quantitative data that allows to gain a better understanding of CSR Information Source and its effect on attitude formation. Additionally, according to Lopes and Nelson (2016) academic research about CSR in Portugal is dispersed and obsolete thus this research contributes to scarce literature. Furthermore, although much research attention has been paid to other individual specific factors such as age, gender and political factors (Shim, Chung and Kim, 2017) this study fills a research gap as Individual Ethical Orientation influence on the relationship of Information Source and Attitude Towards a Company has not been explored before.

In terms of practical implications, this study proofs that the manner of conveying CSR messages is strategically important and it will allow PR, CSR or other relevant departments to set up and choose information sources more effectively. In this context, practitioners might consider relying more on independent sources hence accepting the tradeoff between controllability of the message and credibility. Moreover, the insights might be relevant for companies aiming to target Millennial consumers as this research provides perceptions and reactions of this specific age-group. The present author indicates that under certain conditions CSR activity backfires as, for instance, when Millennials learn about CSR efforts from a biased third-party source, specifically a blogger cooperation. In this case the respective source had an even larger negative effect on the company evaluation compared to when information came from the company itself. This finding enables firms to better align their CSR communication with the values of Millennials in order to elicit favorable attitudes. As further implication, this paper entails the important role of Individual Ethical Orientation and proposes to CSR communicators to carefully analyze the ethical sentiment of a firm's target audience when

implementing and communicating CSR efforts. At the present time, an in-depth understanding of stakeholders is a crucial step to go beyond a traditional framework (Shim, Chung and Kim, 2017). Overall, the author provided evidence that choosing the Information Source advisedly will assist firms to exploit the advantages of CSR engagement and will allow the stimulus to result in a positive attitudinal outcome.

Limitations and Further Research

There are several limitations to this study that have to be noted. Moreover, in the following impulses for new directions in respect to further research are given. The first constraint constitutes of the issue that all measurements for the present research were gathered in the same time span and through identical instruments, thus common method variance might occur (Straub, Limayem and Karahanna-Evaristo, 1995).

Secondly, empirical results were obtained from one industry, more specifically the natural cosmetic industry and can therefore not be used for other sectors. This implies that future studies on CSR communication, more precisely Information Source, should be conducted across various industries to investigate on significant differences.

Third, operationalization or measurement of some variables could have received more consideration. For instance, although this study formulated statistically acceptable measurements for Individual Ethical Orientation and Attitude Towards a Company, a more comprehensive operationalization of the concepts can benefit future research. Furthermore, endeavors would benefit from using a broader basis of stimuli to see any overarching pattern of Individual Ethical Orientation effects.

The sampling method was adequately for the purpose of this study and gathered information about individuals' response to CSR communication stimuli. Even though, to generalize the findings it is suggested to use a more diversified random sample across a more diverse population. Consequently, the author calls for replication research in other countries to

study if nationality and culture has an influence upon the effect of Information Source on attitude and therefore whether the current findings can be generalized to other populations.

In addition, this paper only addresses the topic of CSR communication from the perspective of the younger consumer which seems to be a further constraint of the study. They are inherently diverse in nature hence future endeavors might concentrate on other generational groups as past research has shown significant contrasts in the opinions and attitudes of younger and older consumers. (Carrigan, Szmigin and Wright, 2004)

Another limitation is that the result might be biased due to the fact that employing a scale on consumers' attitude raises the possibility for social desirability (van de Mortel 2008; Uzunoğlu, Türkel and Akyar, 2017). Moreover, this study has investigated on an attitudinal outcome. Sen et al. (2006) supported the positive relation between CSR activities, consumers' attitudes and behavioral outcomes, however they mention that under some conditions a positive attitude does not necessarily elicit a favorable behavioral outcome. Therefore, further studies should investigate on the effect of CSR source information on several behavioral variables.

The last and maybe most important limitation the author has to mention is that the four investigated Information Source scenarios do not offer a stringent description of present "communication patterns" that are common in the market (Wagner, Lutz and Weitz, 2009). Further research should examine the effect of other types of biased and independent third-party sources, that might elicit more positive attitudinal outcomes, as there are other options, for instance magazines and newspapers, experts, non-profit organizations and various others (Kim and Ferguson, 2014). Moreover, variations in source reputations could be tested by disclosing the source.

Resources

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