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**When Consumers are Skeptical of a Company “Doing Good”:
Examining How Company-Cause Fit and Message Specific-ness Interplay on
Consumer Response Toward Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)**

Committee:

Wei-Na Lee, Supervisor

Lucy Atkinson

Lee Ann Kahlor

Tiffany Whittakar

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by

Rachel Lim

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Dedication

To my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

“But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”

1 Corinthians 15: 10

And to my husband, daughter, and son
for their bountiful love and support.

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Abstract

When Consumers are Skeptical of a Company “Doing Good”: Examining How Company-Cause Fit and Message Specific-ness Interplay on Consumer Response Toward Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Rachel Lim, Ph. D

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Supervisor: Wei-Na Lee

This dissertation intends to establish a theoretical framework that examines relationships among key constructs in corporate social responsibility (CSR), such as a company-cause fit, message specific-ness, and consumer skepticism toward CSR. Three online experiments were conducted to examine the proposed hypotheses. First, study 1 examines the extent to which the levels of a company-cause fit influence consumer skepticism and evaluation of a company and their CSR. Second, study 2 investigates the role of message specific-ness on consumer skepticism and their response toward a company and its CSR. Lastly, study 3 studies the interaction effect of company-cause fit and message specific-ness on how consumers respond to a company and its CSR. The results reveal that company-cause fit types (i.e., low versus high), and message specific-ness types (i.e., more specific versus less specific) are significant factors that influence consumer skepticism and evaluation of a company and its CSR. Moreover, the findings in study 3 reveal that a significant interaction effect of company-cause fit and message specific-ness on how consumers consider a company as socially responsible. Lastly, all three

studies indicate that consumer skepticism mediated the impact of the levels of a company-cause fit, message specific-ness and its interaction on their response toward a company and its CSR. In conclusion, this dissertation contributes in advancing the knowledge of CSR by offering fresh insights of understanding how consumer process messages varying in the degrees of specific-ness and a company-cause fit. This research also provides practical implications for practitioners to effectively communicate their CSR to consumers.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS	IX
LIST OF TABLES	XII
LIST OF FIGURES	XIII
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	1
Organization of The Dissertation	7
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW	8
CONSUMER SKEPTICISM	8
Defining Skepticism.....	9
Disposition versus Situational Skepticism	10
Skepticism and Persuasion.....	12
PERCEIVED COMPANY-CAUSE FIT	15
Definition of Company-Cause Fit.....	16
Dimensions of Fit: How Fit is Created	17
How Company-cause Fit Works	20
Company-cause Fit and Consumer Response to CSR	23
MESSAGE SPECIFIC-NESS	27
The Concreteness Effect	31
Message Specific-ness in Marketing Communication.....	38
CHAPTER 3. THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT	44
Perceived Company-Cause Fit and Consumer Response to CSR	44
Perceived Company-Cause Fit and Skepticism	44
Perceived Company-Cause Fit and Consumer Evaluation	46
The Mediating Role of Consumer Skepticism on the Effect of Company-Cause Fit.....	49
Message Specific-ness and Consumer Response to CSR	52
Message Specific-ness and Skepticism.....	52
How Consumer Skepticism mediates the Effect of Message Specific-ness	55
The Interaction Effect of Company-Cause Fit and Message Specific-ness.....	56
The Mediating Role of Consumer Skepticism on the Interaction Effect of Company-cause fit and Message Specific-ness	59
CHAPTER 4. STUDY 1	61
METHOD	61
Research Goal	61
Study Design.....	61

Sample Characteristics	61
Stimuli Development	62
Constructs	66
Procedure	70
Analysis Method	70
RESULTS	71
Reliability Analysis.....	71
Manipulation Checks	71
Hypothesis Testing.....	72
DISCUSSION.....	76
CHAPTER 5. STUDY 2	80
METHOD	80
Research Goal	80
Study Design.....	80
Sample Characteristics.....	80
Stimuli Development	81
Constructs	83
Procedure	84
Analysis Method	84
RESULTS	85
Reliability Analysis.....	85
Manipulation Checks	85
Hypothesis Testing.....	86
DISCUSSION.....	90
CHAPTER 6. STUDY 3	94
METHOD	94
Research Goal	94
Study Design.....	94
Sample Characteristics.....	95
Stimuli Development	95
Constructs	98
Procedure	99
Analysis Method	100
RESULTS	100

Reliability Analysis.....	100
Manipulation Checks	101
Hypotheses Testing.....	103
DISCUSSION	109
CHAPTER 7. IMPLICATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH.....	114
SUMMARY	114
IMPLICATIONS	115
A company-cause fit	116
Message Specific-ness	118
The Interaction Effect of Company-Cause Fit and Message Specific-ness.....	120
Issues of Consumer Skepticism	123
LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH.....	124
APPENDICES	126
Appendix A: Company’s Description of Knip Foods.....	126
Appendix B: Stimuli of Advertisements I	127
Appendix C: Stimuli of Advertisements II	128
Appendix D: Stimuli of Advertisements III.....	129
Appendix E: Fit Measurement	131
Appendix F: Message Specific-ness Measurement	132
Appendix G: Consumer Skepticism toward CSR.....	133
Appendix H: Attitudes toward the advertisement.....	134
Appendix I: Attitudes toward the company	135
Appendix J: Socially Responsible Image	136
Appendix K: Supportive Intention	137
Appendix L: Product Evaluation	138
Appendix M: Perceived Uniqueness.....	139
REFERENCES.....	140

LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1. Descriptive Statistics for CSR Topics in Pretest I	65
Table 4.2. Reliability Analysis for Study 1	71
Table 4.3. Manipulation Check for Study 1	71
Table 4.4. Proposed Hypotheses in Study 1	72
Table 4.5. Descriptive Statistic and T-values	73
Table 4.6. Path Coefficients	74
Table 4.7. Indirect Effects of CC fit on Dependent Variables via Skepticism (Mediator) (5000 Bootstrap Samples)	75
Table 4.8. Mediation Analysis (Hayes’s Process Model 4)	75
Table 4.9. A Summary of Hypotheses Testing Results	79
Table 5.1. Reliability Analysis for Study 2	85
Table 5.2. Manipulation check for Study 2: Message Specific-ness	86
Table 5.3. Proposed Hypotheses in Study 2	86
Table 5.4. Descriptive Statistic and T-values	87
Table 5.5. Mediation Analysis (Hayes’s Process Model 4) Indirect Effects of Message specific- ness on Dependent Variables via Skepticism (Mediator) (5000 Bootstrap Samples)	89
Table 5.6. R-square for the proposed mediation models:	89
Table 5.7. Path Coefficients	90
Table 5.8. A Summary of Hypotheses Testing Results	93
Table 6.1. Descriptive statistics for Message Specific-ness	98
Table 6.2. Descriptive statistics for Message Specific-ness and CC fit	98
Table 6.3. Random assignment for each cell: Cross-Tabulation analysis	100
Table 6.4. Reliability Analysis for Study 3	101
Table 6.5. Manipulation Check for Message Specific-ness	101
Table 6.6. Descriptive Statistics for the Message Specific-ness Manipulation Check Scale	102
Table 6.7. Manipulation Check for CC Fit	102
Table 6.8. Descriptive Statistics for the CC Fit Manipulation Check Scale	103
Table 6.9. Proposed Hypotheses in Study 3	103
Table 6.10. Effects of CC Fit and Message Specific-ness on Consumer responses to a company’s CSR	107
Table 6.11. Descriptive Statistics and Planned Contrast Analysis Result	107
Table 6.12. Indirect Effects of Message specific-ness on Dependent Variables via Skepticism (Mediator) (5000 Bootstrap Samples)	108
Table 6.13. R-square for the proposed mediation models:	108
Table 6.14. Path Coefficients	109
Table 6.15. A Summary of Hypotheses Testing Results	113

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1. Proposed conceptual model	43
Figure 4.1. CC fit effect on consumer response mediated by CSR skepticism	61
Figure 4.2. Skepticism mediated the effect of CC fit on Attitude toward the ad & company, socially responsible image, and intention to support the company	74
Figure 5.1. Message Specific-ness on consumer response mediated by CSR skepticism	80
Figure 5.2. Skepticism mediated the effect of message specific-ness on attitude toward the ad & company, socially responsible image, intention to support the company, and perceived uniqueness	90
Figure 6.1. CSR skepticism mediates the interaction effect of Company-cause fit and message specific-ness on consumer response	94
Figure 6.2. Consumer skepticism mediated the interaction effect of company-cause fit and message specific-ness on socially responsible image, intention to support a company, and product evaluation.....	106

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is an organizational commitment to improving societal well-being through discretionary business practices and contributions of corporate resources (Kotler & Lee, 2005). A company's social responsibility has expanded from providing a maximum financial return to shareholders to fulfilling obligations to an ever-broadening group of stakeholders (Carroll, 1991, 1999, 2016). The general public has also demanded more of companies, compelling them to engage in CSR practices (Cone, 2017). Thus, corporate social involvement has become a mainstream, highly visible, and commonplace practice (Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013; Taylor, 2018).

Today, companies are more than ever relying on public relations and advertising to effectively communicate their CSR (Cone, 2017; Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010; Taylor, 2018). Brands and companies are employing more direct communication channels to convey news of their socially responsible actions to consumers. For example, a recent Audi Super Bowl commercial touted their commitment to gender equality in employment (Buss, 2017). By redefining masculinity, Gillette promoted its concern about gender identity issues, a move that generated a good deal of publicity (Zupan, 2019). And many other companies are investigating deeply into the potential benefits of publicizing their good works (Porter & Kramer, 2006; Skard & Thorbjørnsen, 2014). The more the public talks about a brand and its societal issue, the more skilled they become at evaluating a company's CSR. The key to companies reaping positive, social benefits from their CSR commitments, according to scholars is communication (Du et al., 2010; Korschun, Bhattacharya, & Swain, 2014; Sankar Sen, Bhattacharya, & Korschun, 2006). Thus, companies need to devise appropriate strategies to effectively communicate their CSR activity with consumers.

Consumers are often skeptical of how authentic companies' concern is about the societal issues they promote (Du et al., 2010; P. S. Ellen, Webb, & Mohr, 2006; Forehand & Grier, 2003; Rifon, Choi, Trimble, & Li, 2004; Rim, Yang, & Lee, 2016; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013; Szykman, Bloom, & Blazing, 2004; Wagner, Lutz, & Weitz, 2009; Webb & Mohr, 1998; Yoon, Gürhan-Canli, & Schwarz, 2006). The popular press suggests that consumers are more skeptical today than ever before (Schumpeter, 2014). They know that firms, in order to boost sales, may resort to "do-good" appeals (e.g., sustainability, social responsibility) (Das, Guha, Biswas, & Krishnan, 2016). Some observers are critical of social responsibility themes, seeing CSR as a marketing gimmick or "greenwashing" (Economist, 2005; (Jahdi & Acikdilli, 2009). Such observers often question a company's true motives, even perceiving such initiatives to be hypocritical (Wagner et al., 2009).

Consumer skepticism broadly refers to consumer distrust or disbelief of marketer actions. These actions may include making claims that consumers disbelieve (Darke & Ritchie, 2007; Obermiller, Spangenberg, & MacLachlan, 2005; Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998). Consumer may also mistrust the marketer's motives (Bobinski, Cox, & Cox, 1996; Boush, Friestad, & Rose, 1994; Forehand & Grier, 2003; Schindler, Morrin, & Bechwati, 2005; Thakor & Goneau-Lessard, 2009; Webb & Mohr, 1998). When consumers refuse to put stock in marketing practices, they often protect themselves from fraud and misleading claims (Mangleburg & Bristol, 1998; Mohr, Eroğlu, & Ellen, 1998). Furthermore, consumer skepticism can help deter marketers from engaging in potentially deceptive practices (Mohr et al., 1998). However, when skepticism is deepened and over-generalized, it can undermine marketing efficiency (Pollay & Mittal, 1993). Likewise, the CSR literature emphasizes that a key challenge in reaping positive

business benefits through CSR communication is to overcome consumer skepticism (Du et al., 2010; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013).

Skepticism can be a stable personality trait; it can be a result of certain characteristics of a marketer or of a message (Forehand & Grier, 2003). Thus, it is critical for advertisers to understand what those characteristics are and how to avoid unnecessarily undermining the credibility of their ad claims (Kim & Lee, 2009). This dissertation focuses on examining the antecedents of situational skepticism in CSR and its impact on consumer-related outcomes. Despite the widespread occurrence and importance of consumer skepticism of a company's actions, there is a dearth of studies on the determinants and consequences of consumer skepticism of CSR. Thus, to establish effective CSR communication, it is important to understand the relationship between consumer skepticism and key marketing communication variables. Accordingly, this dissertation focuses on studying the determinants of consumer skepticism by connecting key variables in CSR communication.

Some marketing strategies can succeed at lessening consumer skepticism and generating a positive response. Such strategies include establishing an appropriate company-cause fit (Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, & Hill, 2006; Menon & Kahn, 2003; Pracejus & Olsen, 2004; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006) and crafting strategic messages (Andreu, Casado-Díaz, & Mattila, 2015; Connors, Anderson-MacDonald, & Thomson, 2017; Du et al., 2010; Y. J. Kim & Lee, 2009; Lim, Sung, & Lee, 2018). Over the years, researchers have repeatedly emphasized the importance of establishing a logical association between the cause a company supports and its character (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Drumwright, 1996; Forehand & Grier, 2003; Menon & Kahn, 2003; Rifon et al., 2004; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006; Varadarajan & Menon, 1988). Researchers argue that consumers generally expect companies to focus on social issues that have

a natural connection to their core corporate activities (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Du et al., 2010; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006). Indeed, research has shown that high company-cause fit garners more favorable responses than low fit (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Lee, Park, Rapert, & Newman, 2012; Lim et al., 2018; Menon & Kahn, 2003; Rim et al., 2016; S. Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006; Speed & Thompson, 2000; Varadarajan & Menon, 1988). In contrast, consumers tend to react less favorably to a company's CSR when the company-cause fit is low (Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006). Prior studies have revealed that a low company-cause fit leads to less clarity in market positioning (Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006) and generates more negative thoughts (Menon & Khan, 2003; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006). Researchers have even suggested that low company-cause fit activates attributional thinking in consumers to find the true motive in CSR (Du et al., 2010; Ellen et al., 2006; Szykman et al., 2004; Yoon et al., 2006).

Although researchers emphasize the importance of fit, there have been mixed results regarding the effects of high and low company-cause fit (de Jong & van der Meer, 2017; Nan & Heo, 2007). Some research has shown that under certain circumstances, high CSR fit can backfire, and low CSR fit can lead to better results (Barone, Norman, & Miyazaki, 2007; Bloom, Hoeffler, Keller, & Meza, 2006; Pam Scholder Ellen, Mohr, & Webb, 2000; K. Kim, Cheong, & Lim, 2015). Many researchers have assumed that lower fit activates skepticism and attribution of a company's motive (Rifon et al., 2004), yet not many studies have actually empirically tested the relationship between the level of company-cause fit and consumer skepticism. Therefore, the first goal of this dissertation research is to bring more clarity to the role of fit in consumer skepticism and their response toward a company's CSR.

For a company to elicit favorable CSR responses, it should consider, scholars have pointed out, various message factors. For instance, a company's CSR message can pertain largely to a company's social responsibility belief or to specific involvement/actions in a social cause (Du et al., 2010; Lim, Sung, & Lee, 2015). Research has shown that consumers prefer detailed and specific information about social causes that a company supports such as environmental issues (Atkinson & Rosenthal, 2014; Ganz & Grimes, 2018; Grau, Garretson, & Pirsch, 2007; Manrai, Manrai, Lascu, & Ryans, 1997; Mohr, Webb, & Harris, 2001). Consumers in fact differentiate between vague and concrete claims in communication messages (Kangun, Carlson, & Grove, 1991). They tend to be suspicious of obscure messages (Das et al. 2016; Grau et al., 2007). In fact, a key challenge in CSR communication is to overcome consumer skepticism, and recent research suggests that concrete information mitigates the negative effects of inherent skepticism in CSR (Connors et al., 2017). Prior research has yielded evidence of the advantage to using concrete messages over abstract ones in CSR communication. Nonetheless, there has been less of an attempt to theoretically understand what message specific-ness is and what impact it has.

A great deal of empirical evidence in psychology has shown that concrete concepts have a cognitive advantage over abstract concepts. Researchers continually demonstrate that compared to abstract concepts, concrete concepts are recognized faster than abstract ones (Bleasdale, 1987; de Groot, 1989; Kroll & Merves, 1986), are recalled better (Doest & Semin, 2005; Paivio, 1969), processed more fluently (Hansen, Dechene, & Wänke, 2008; Reber & Schwarz, 1999; Unkelbach, 2007), perceived as more familiar (Begg, Anas, & Farinacci, 1992) and are seen as more truthful (Hansen & Wänke, 2010).

Adopting Rosch's (1978) conceptualization, this research defines message specific-ness as messages that vary in terms of the graded notion of abstractness-concreteness, referring to generic versus specific information (e.g., (Feldman, Bearden, & Hardesty, 2006; Ganz & Grimes, 2018; Johnson & Fornell, 1987; Johnson & Kisielius, 1985; Macklin, Bruvold, & Shea, 1985; Spreen & Schulz, 1966; Wiemer-Hastings & Xu, 2005). While prior studies examined the notion of specific-ness, they often failed to manipulate message specific-ness correctly or in a consistent manner. For example, MacKenzie's study (1986) manipulated messages by using imagery-evoking words and specific-ness of the information (Ci, 2008). Prior studies also overlooked potential confounding factors such as consumer knowledge (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987, 2000), amount of information (Macklin et al., 1985), and qualitatively different meanings in abstract and concrete concepts (Wiemer-Hastings & Xu, 2005). Moreover, a source for the inconsistent findings regarding the message specific-ness effect may be traced to scholars' inadequately defining and operationalizing the construct (Andreoli & Worchel, 1978; Borgida, 1979; Dickson, 1982; Fernandez & Rosen, 2000; Kisielius & Sternthal, 1984; Percy, 1982; Rossiter & Percy, 1978). Therefore, a second goal of this research is to resolve these issues and carefully examine the effect of message specific-ness in CSR. Specifically, this research aims to better understand the role of message specific-ness on consumer skepticism and their responses toward a company's CSR.

Therefore, this dissertation contributes to the CSR literature by establishing a theoretical framework that explains the relationships among key theoretical constructs in CSR. These constructs include company-cause fit, message specific-ness, and consumer skepticism of CSR, all of which can impact consumer responses toward a company and its CSR. And these responses ultimately impact business outcomes.

Organization of The Dissertation

This dissertation is organized as follows. Chapter 2 provides a detailed review of past research on three primary constructs—fit, message specific-ness, and consumer skepticism. Based on the literature review, Chapter 3 lays out a theoretical conceptualization as well as testable hypotheses. Chapter 4 to 6 illustrate research methods, results and discussions of the three studies conducted, and Chapter 7 presents implications and suggests future research.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

CONSUMER SKEPTICISM

Skepticism broadly refers to consumer distrust or disbelief of marketer actions. These actions may include consumers' disbelief in claims made by the marketer (Darke & Ritchie, 2007; Obermiller et al., 2005; Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998, 2000) and/or consumer mistrust in the marketer's motives (Bobinski et al., 1996; Boush et al., 1994; Forehand & Grier, 2003; Schindler et al., 2005; Thakor & Goneau-Lessard, 2009; Webb & Mohr, 1998), as well as in their public relations efforts (e.g., (Ford, Smith, & Swasy, 1990; Pirsch, Gupta, & Grau, 2007; Webb & Mohr, 1998).

A growing amount of CSR literature points out that one of the barriers to CSR practices is skepticism (e.g., Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010; Rim & Kim, 2016; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013; Wagner et al., 2009). Consumers who tend to have higher skepticism toward a company's CSR conduct may generally doubt whether the CSR messages and CSR activities are truthful and believable (Webb & Mohr, 1998). Moreover, when consumers attribute a company's CSR to self-serving motives, they are more likely to consumers become skeptical of a company's CSR, resulting in less favorable responses (Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013). Likewise, the unresolved skepticism produces negative business outcome (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 2001; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013), and becomes detrimental in building trust and relationship with stakeholders (Mohr et al., 1998). When skepticism deepens and is over-generalized, it can undermine marketing efficiency (Pollay & Mittal, 1993; Kim & Lee, 2009).

Prior research has focused on examining the relationship between consumer CSR skepticism to business outcome (Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013), and the effect of marketing communication variables on outcome (Forehand & Grier 2003; Mohr & Kahn 2003; Mohr et al.,

1998; Obermiller & Spangenberg, 2000). However, antecedents of CSR skepticism remain under investigated (Rim, 2018; Rim & Kim, 2016). Even less research has been done discovering the extent to which consumer skepticism is impacted by key theoretical constructs in CSR communication, such as message strategy and a company-cause fit. The CSR fit literature speculates that a company-cause fit activates attributional thinking, a type of thinking that is closely connected to skepticism (Menon & Kahn, 2003; Rifon et al., 2004; Simmon & Becker-Olsen, 2006; Szyman et al., 2004; Yoon et al., 2006). Nevertheless, there is lack of research on its connection to and impact on consumer response. Furthermore, research has shown that message strategies (e.g., specific versus general message strategies) impact consumer skepticism and response (Grau et al., 2007; Rim, 2018). Nonetheless, little research has theorized or empirically tested the effect of message specific-ness on skepticism.

Therefore, this research attempts to establish a theoretical explanation on the relationship of company-cause fit, message specific-ness, and consumer skepticism, and empirically test the proposed relationships. The aim here is to understand the extent to which key CSR communication factors influence consumer skepticism in such a way that their responses are impacted.

Defining Skepticism

Consumer skepticism in the context of CSR is their state of disbelieving or distrusting a company's authenticity in trying to carry out corporate social responsibility (CSR). The elements of a company's CSR that consumers can be skeptical of include their true motives, specific social responsibility claims, the actual impact and public relations efforts (e.g., (Ellen et al., 2006; Ford et al., 1990; Forehand & Grier, 2003; Kim & Lee, 2009; Mohr et al., 2001; Obermiller et al., 2005; Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998, 2000; Pirsch et al., 2007; Rim & Kim, 2016; Skarmeas

& Leonidou, 2013; Szykman et al., 2004; Wagner et al., 2009; Webb & Mohr, 1998; Yoon et al., 2006).

Disposition versus Situational Skepticism

Researchers have conceptualized consumer skepticism in two ways—dispositional and situational skepticism (Forehand & Grier, 2003). The former is a stable personality trait, while the latter, situational skepticism, is a temporarily heightened level of skepticism engendered by certain characteristics of a marketer or a message (Forehand & Grier, 2003).

Dispositional skepticism is as a trait that predisposes individuals to doubt the veracity of various forms of marketing communication, including advertising, public relations (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998) and a company's social responsibility initiative (Forehand & Grier, 2003; Mohr et al., 1998; Hyejoon Rim & Kim, 2016). Dispositional skepticism has typically been conceptualized as a stable belief that increases consumer general distrust of marketing communications (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998). Obermiller and Spangenberg (1998) defined general skepticism toward ad as “the tendency toward disbelief of advertising claims” (pg.160). They considered skepticism toward advertising in general as a stable, generalizable marketplace belief, one of the overarching propositions that compose a consumer's implicit theory of how the marketplace operates (Moore-Shay & Lutz, 1988). Webb and Mohr (1998) defined skeptics as people “predisposed to distrust” cause-related marketing offers.

Trait skepticism varies by individuals. Indeed, it is closely related to the extent to which a person holds persuasion knowledge (Boush et al., 1994; Friestad & Wright, 1994; Obermiller et al., 2005; Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998). Research suggests that consumers develop persuasion knowledge through numerous social interactions that develop beliefs about strategic deceptions and advertising goals (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Consumers, even at a young age,

generally recognize that advertisers typically try to persuade them that their messages can be biased and possibly false (Boush et al., 1994; Derbaix & Pecheux, 2003). When consumers have high dispositional skepticism, they tend to do the following: pay less attention to advertising, like advertising to a lesser extent, and discount the information value of advertising (Obermiller et al., 2005). Therefore, trait skepticism generally influences how consumers react to a company's message strategy, tactics, and practices.

Consumers with higher disposition skepticism are already more knowledgeable about a company's CSR tactics (i.e., a cause-related marketing drives sale; (Matthes & Wonneberger, 2014). Hence, they often react more negatively when the public benefit of the company's cause-related marketing is more salient than the company's benefit (Bae, 2018). The salience of the public-serving motive in effect conflicts with what they already believe about the firm (Cho, 2006). Consumers with low levels of skepticism are more likely to be influenced by sustainability information at the retail shelf (Cho & Baskin, 2018), engage in environmentally friendly behaviors (Leary, Vann, & Mittelstaedt, 2017), and are more reactive to advertising (Obermiller et al., 2005). Webb and Mohr (1998) also suggest that individuals who are highly skeptical of CSR believe that a for-profit company's social responsibility effort is a self-serving agenda. Therefore, a dispositional skepticism is closely related to the level of the person's knowledge, experiences, and personality.

In contrast to dispositional skepticism, situational skepticism may be localized to specific marketers or messages. Situational skepticism is a cognitive response that has context-based origins. A situational skepticism directs a consumer's attention to the motives of marketers; it thereby induces a "state of skepticism" (Forehand & Grier, 2003). Researchers have argued that this "ability of the context-dependent skepticism construct to more accurately reflect cognitions

specific to the issues and communications regarding environmental claims constitutes another justification for the focus of the present study” (Mohr et al., 1998).

A situational skepticism is not simply driven by beliefs that a company’s motives are self-serving. It is also driven by the perception that the company is being deceptive about the true motives (Forehand & Grier, 2003). Accordingly, it varies depending on the context and situation (e.g., (Forehand & Grier, 2003; Mohr et al., 1998; Vanhamme & Grobben, 2009). A consumer becomes skeptical of marketing messages when, for example, a company’s behaviors cannot be reconciled with its claims or when they make advertisement claims that are difficult to verify (Folkes, 1988b; Ford et al., 1990; Forehand & Grier, 2003; Scott B. MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989; Mohr et al., 1998; Sparkman Jr & Locander, 1980; Vanhamme & Grobben, 2009).

Researchers often attempt to assess how certain types of claims and marketing strategies affect skepticism toward specific ads, a company, and its CSR. Prior research has assessed how different types of advertising claims (e.g., claims concerning search, experience, credence attributes and objective versus subjective) affected consumers’ skepticism toward specific claims (Darley & Smith, 1993; Ford et al., 1990). Forehand and Grier (2003) found that situational skepticism varied by the marketer and the message formulation. Kim and Lee (2009) suggested that consumers were more likely to disbelieve an ad claim when the ad used an ambiguous cue (e.g., a substantial portion) than when they used an explicit one (e.g., 15% of the price) to indicate what portion of a donation would go to its social cause.

Skepticism and Persuasion

In general, consumers use skepticism as a defensive mechanism to protect themselves from misleading and deceptive marketing practices. Consumers develop skeptical attitudes toward advertising and marketing as they accumulate knowledge about marketing tactics

(Friestad & Wright, 1994). Although skepticism works as a positive function to help consumers make good decisions (Friestad & Wright, 1994), when it is over-generalized, it is likely to diminish the marketing efficiency (Kim & Lee, 2009). Furthermore, researchers continually posit that consumer skepticism is a key challenge in producing an effective CSR communication (Du et al., 2010).

As noted above, skepticism is closely connected to persuasion knowledge. According to Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM) consumers hold and develop knowledge about marketers' persuasion attempts (e.g., advertisements), which influences their responses to these attempts (Friestad & Wright, 1994). PKM suggests consumers learn to interpret and evaluate the persuasion agents' goals and tactics and use this knowledge to cope with persuasion attempts (Campbell & Kirmani, 2000; Kelley & Michela, 1980; Lange & Washburn, 2012). They have opinions about the appropriateness and effectiveness of marketing tactics, and their skepticism relates to the amount of persuasion knowledge they use to develop judgments about the persuasive marketing communication (Friestad & Wright, 1994).

The PKM research has consistently argued that accessing persuasion knowledge usually entails skepticism (e.g., see Cheema, 2008; Krishna & Ahluwalia, 2008; Szykman et al., 2004; Wojdyski & Evans, 2016). For example, researchers generally suggest that skepticism of advertising claims (Kirmani & Zhu, 2007), raises consumers' "cognitive defenses" (Russell, 2002), prompts an increased likelihood of persuasion knowledge access (Campbell & Kirmani, 2000), and leads consumers "to question the credibility" of advertising (Xu & Wyer, 2010). In addition, a consumer who is primed to be more prevention-focused is likely to be more skeptical, which increases the likelihood that she will access persuasion knowledge in response to a persuasion attempt (Kirmani & Zhu, 2007). Friestad and Wright (1994) argued that when

consumers realize they are the target of a persuasion attempt, they try to interpret and cope with the marketers' sales presentations and advertising to glean useful, goal-relevant information from persuasion attempts. While coping with the persuasion attempt, consumers use their knowledge-based expectations about persuasion attempts (Goodstein, 1993) and memories about the features of persuasion attempts (Friestad & Thorson, 1993; Schmidt & Sherman, 1984). Regardless of the causal direction examined or assumed, prior research on persuasion knowledge has tended to center on the association between persuasion knowledge and skepticism.

However, many scholars contend that skepticism actually reduces the effectiveness of persuasion. Researchers suggest that consumers are not likely to be motivated to process information from an ad or a company (MacInnis, Moorman, & Jaworski, 1991). Research also suggests consumers often cannot analyze the marketer's message because they lack sufficient resources, such as knowledge (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987, 2000), contextual information, (Shapiro, MacInnis, & Heckler, 1997) and cognitive capacity (Malaviya, Kisielius, & Sternthal, 1996; Meyers-Levy & Malaviya, 1999). When consumers struggle to make ethical judgements, it is more likely that their skepticism works as a cognitive shortcut to evaluate the company's CSR (MacCoun, 1998). Eventually, a consumer's skepticism may cause one to discount the CSR claim and respond less favorably toward the company and its CSR.

Several past studies in CSR implies that skepticism lead to more negative responses (Menon & Kahn 2003; Rifon et al., 2004; Szyman et al., 2004; Yoon et al., 2006). Menon and Kahn (2003) assumed that consumers generally become suspicious of the ulterior motive of a company's philanthropic effort thus the level of congruence between a company and its supporting cause is likely to influence their response toward an advocacy advertising. Yoon et al. (2006) argue that consumers consider a company's CSR as less sincere when the company's

benefit is salient due to the underlying distrust of toward the altruistic motives in CSR. Rifon et al. (2004) suggest that a high congruence between a brand and social sponsorship may minimize skepticism due to low cognitive elaboration that lead to more positive attitudes. Szyman et al. (2004) also reveal that participants were highly skeptical of Budweiser's true motives in sponsoring anti-drinking and driving message, which led to less credibility toward the sponsorship when a corporation sponsored a socially-oriented message compared to a nonprofit organization sponsoring the same message. Therefore, skepticism plays an important role on how consumers evaluate a company's CSR.

PERCEIVED COMPANY-CAUSE FIT

Researchers have identified the fit between a company and the social cause it supports as one of the most important factors in driving positive CSR outcomes. The logic is that consumers will view a firm more favorably if it supports social causes that go well with the firm's image (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Menon & Kahn, 2003; Pracejus & Olsen, 2004; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006; Speed & Thompson, 2000). In contrast, when there is incongruence between a company and its supporting cause, consumers often generate negative attitudes toward a company and its CSR (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Menon & Kahn, 2003; Pracejus & Olsen, 2004; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006). Consumers have difficulty integrating new knowledge into their existing cognitive structure; this generally leads individuals to elaborate more about the sponsorship (Menon & Kahn, 2003), engender more negative thoughts, as well as poor brand positioning (Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006) and negative evaluations (Alcañiz, Cáceres, & Pérez, 2010; Gupta & Pirsch, 2006; Pracejus & Olsen, 2004; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001).

Studies have revealed the impact of company-cause fit on how consumers respond to a company's CSR. Sen and Bhattacharya (2001) suggested that fit leads to a significant positive effect on the purchase intention. Also, Becker-Olsen and colleagues (2006) found that the absence of fit, in comparison with the presence of fit, results in more negativity from consumers, more suspicion about the company's motives, and a significantly more negative attitude towards the company. Similarly, unfit can lead to more negative attitudes towards the company (Yoon et al., 2006). Forehand and Greier (2003) postulated that a presence of firm-serving attributions lowers the evaluation of a firm when a company-cause fit is incongruent.

However, past research has shown mixed results when it comes to the impact of fit on consumer response toward a company and its social responsibility. Nan and Heo (2007) did not, for example, observe a company-cause fit on brand attitude. Lafferty(2007) also suggested that the impact of fit on consumer response disappears because the degree of corporate credibility is so influential on brand attitude formation in cause-related marketing. Therefore, this research aims to examine the impact of company-cause fit on consumer skepticism and to responses to confirm the existing theoretical framework of fit. The following sections provide a literature review on how fit has been defined, classified, and on theories that explicate fit.

Definition of Company-Cause Fit

The degree to which a consumer perceives congruence between a firm and the cause it sponsors is generally referred to as fit (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006; Varadarajan & Menon, 1988). Fit has been studied in numerous contexts. These include the following: source effects (Kamins, 1990; Lafferty, 2007; McCracken, 1989; Ohanian, 1991), strategic alliances (Lee, Lee, & Lee, 2013; Park, Jun, & Shocker, 1996; Simonin & Ruth, 1998) brand extensions (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Broniarczyk & Alba, 1994; Herr, Farquhar, & Fazio,

1996; K. L. Keller & Aaker, 1992), event sponsorship (Crimmins & Horn, 1996; Speed & Thompson, 2000) and CSR (Barone et al., 2007; Bridges, Keller, & Sood, 2000; Hoeffler & Keller, 2002; Lichtenstein, Drumwright, & Braig, 2004; Menon & Kahn, 2003; Nan & Heo, 2007; Robinson, Irmak, & Jayachandran, 2012). An abundance of evidence indicates that fit plays an essential role in shaping audiences' responses to a company's CSR (Barone et al., 2007; P. S. Ellen et al., 2006; Kuo & Rice, 2015; Menon & Kahn, 2003; Pracejus & Olsen, 2004; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006). Researchers have suggested that consumers can derive fit from a company's mission, products, market positions, attributes, brand concept, or any other key associations (Bridges et al., 2000; Kuo & Rice, 2015; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006). The following sections detail how fit is created and explained, and in what way it works in CSR.

Dimensions of Fit: How Fit is Created

The perception of fit has been conceptualized as originating from multiple sources such as conceptual relatedness, consistency in images; and perceptual similarities (Bridges et al., 2000; Kuo & Rice, 2015; Park, Lawson, & Milberg, 1991). This section discusses how fit is created from different cognitive bases.

Conceptual fit

Conceptual fit has been operationalized as the conceptual congruence between a firm and cause at the organizational level. Conceptual fit embodies the idea of transferability of expertise or synergies in activities such as when there is similarity in products, technologies, or markets (Rumelt, 1974) or complementarity of skills and activities (Porter, 1991). In the brand extension literature, researchers have delineated fit based on the following conditions: the extension complementing use with other products sold by the parent brand (Aaker & Keller, 1990), being in a product category where the parent brand can contribute an appealing attribute (Broniarczyk

& Alba, 1994; Herr, Farquar, & Fazio, 1996), being in a product category similar to other products sold by the parent brand (Keller & Aaker, 1992) and having a parent brand with the skill and expertise to make the extension product (Aaker & Keller, 1990). Thus, the ideas of transferability of expertise and synergy underlies in fit that is transferred in the intangible associations (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Broniarczyk & Alba, 1994; John, Loken, & Joiner, 1998; Lichtenstein et al., 2004; Loken & John, 1993; Simonin & Ruth, 1998). In event sponsorship, for example, researchers have highlighted the importance of the link or the “fit” between the sponsor and the sponsored event (Crimmins & Horn, 1996) that results from “functional based similarity” (Gwinner, 1997), such as how related of the sponsor’s product is to the event.

In the social alliance and cause-related marketing, a fit has been examined by using similarities between company and the cause (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Drumwright, 1996; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006), such as fit established when a brand and a social cause share a similar value (e.g., Johnson & Johnson first aid products and the American Red Cross; Nan & Heo, 2007). Researchers tend to focus on the relatedness of conceptual attributes (e.g., corporate values and product positioning). For example, experimental manipulations of company-cause fit have included the following: the pairings of orange juice with the Healthy Diet Research Association (Nan & Heo, 2007), school supplies with the National Education Association (Robinson et al., 2012), and pharmaceuticals with breast cancer awareness (Barone et al., 2007). Similarly, Simmons and Becker-Olsen (2006) defined a natural fit as the extent to which the sponsored cause is perceived as being congruent with the sponsor’s image so that the company’s skill may be converted to help the societal cause. A couple of natural fits, for example, are Sports Authority paired with Special Olympics and Alpo paired with Humane Society. Therefore, a

conceptual company-cause fit is established through the transferability of the company's expertise in supporting the social cause.

Perceptual fit

Researchers also posit that a company-cause fit can be created through perceptual similarities. Perceptual fit is defined as the overlap of perceptual attributes such as color, size, and shape between a firm and the supporting cause that do not imply a transferability of expertise. Within the context of company-cause fit, researchers have discussed characteristics such as color or visual similarity (e.g., Zdravkovic, Magnusson, & Stanley, 2010), and Kuo and Rice (2015) discussed how cause-related marketing (CRM) campaigns can be impacted by perceptual attributes. Anecdotal evidence suggests that perceptual attributes play an important role in the perception of firm-cause fit. The AIDS relief effort of the Product Red campaign, for example, has generated millions of dollars in support for humanitarian efforts in Africa and involves many high-profile firms like Coca-Cola. Although the pairing of Coca-Cola and Product Red lacks conceptual congruence (i.e., Coca-Cola's brand image and corporate values are not related to those of an AIDS relief organization), the iconic red color of Coca-Cola Classic maps directly onto the visual qualities of the Product Red campaign. Based upon the premise that a firm must fit its cause in a successful CRM campaign, it appears that, in this example, perceptual congruence may be the basis by which firm-cause fit is perceived.

In the brand alliance literature, Park et al. (1991) found that perceived fit (i.e., between a parent brand and proposed extensions) is a function of both product-feature similarity (i.e., relatedness of perceptual attributes) and brand-concept-consistency (i.e., relatedness of conceptual attributes). Likewise, Bridges et al. (2000) found that when consumers evaluate brand extension fit they use attribute-based associations (e.g., physical features) when evaluating brand

extension fit. Furthermore, extensions from one category to another with shared physical characteristics (e.g., watches and purses both contain leather) were evaluated more favorably when attribute-based associations were emphasized (Bridges et al., 2000).

Brand Image Fit

Researchers also posit that a company-cause fit is driven by the consistency of images. In the brand extension literature, researchers posit that fit is created through the extension and is perceived as consistent with the brand concept, overall image of the brand (Grime, Diamantopoulos, & Smith, 2002; Gürhan-Canli & Maheswaran, 1998; Park et al., 1991). This is different from fit created by similarity of features, attributes, or benefits of a company, product, or a brand; instead it is relating the symbolic images or meaning between the brand and its supporting cause (Lau & Phau, 2007). In the literature, research has demonstrated that fit is attainable when both parent and extension of symbolic brands share a common prestige orientation or brand image (Bhat & Reddy, 2001; Park et al., 1991). Research also indicates that emphasizing the transferability of the personality dimensions of the parent brand to the extension brand make the ad more effective (Lau & Phau, 2007).

How Company-cause Fit Works

Affect Transfer

When a product is associated with a positively evaluated object, affect transfer will occur. Affect transfer is the process wherein people's preexisting affect associated with one object is transferred to a closely related object, toward which people may not hold prior affect (Shimp, 1981). Affect transfer has been commonly observed in various marketing contexts. Research in brand extension indicates that consumers often respond favorably to a new product that is introduced by an existing reputable brand (Aaker & Keller, 1990). Similarly, in event

sponsorship, consumers' positive affect toward an event often results in favorable evaluations the sponsoring product (Crimmins & Horn, 1996). Keller (2003) called the affect transfer a brand-leveraging process, wherein marketers attempt to increase the equity of their brands by borrowing equity from others.

In a CSR context, the association between a company and its supporting cause could lead to a process similar to affect transfer. That is, the general positive attitudes toward the cause being supported could be transferred to the sponsoring company. Previous research suggests that consumers perceive a brand to be altruistic when they promise to donate money to a social cause, leading to more favorable brand evaluation (Chernev & Blair, 2015). Furthermore, research suggests that when consumers identify with a company's altruistic behavior, they often experience a sense of connectedness or social identification (Lichtenstein et al., 2004; S. Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001).

Research suggests that affect transfer occurs when there is a relatively high level of fit between the product and the positively evaluated object with which it is associated. In brand-extension research, it has been well documented that the transfer of a parent brand's evaluations to a new extension becomes greater as the parent brand and the extension are perceived more similarly (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Boush & Loken, 1991). The same facilitating effect of fit has been noted for event sponsorship (Gwinner, 1997).

This is because high fit often facilitates this process. It is easy to integrate prior expectations about a company with the social initiatives (Lee & Labroo, 2004; Tversky & Kahneman, 1973). According to the processing fluency view of congruence effect (Lee & Labroo, 2004), individuals' affective evaluations are based on the ease with which instances or associations come to mind" (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973, p 208). A congruent association

between the firm and the cause can be brought to mind more easily, or more fluently processed, than an incongruent association; such fluency-based familiarity leads to favorable ratings of the tasks at hand, which often depend on the questions the audiences are asked (C. M. Kelley & Jacoby, 1990). Maoz and Tybout (2002) also found that higher company-cause fit led to more favorable evaluations of the company. This was due to the ease with which participants integrated, under a low-involvement condition, prior expectations about a company with the social initiative.

Associative Network Theory

Similarly, the associative network theory (Anderson, 1983) postulates that consumers can easily integrate into their existing cognitive structure a good fit between prior expectations of a firm and a given social initiative. Such integration strengthens the association between the firm and the social initiative, and guides audiences to form favorable perceptions of the firm (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Simonin & Ruth, 1998; Speed & Thompson, 2000). The associative network memory model regards semantic memory or knowledge as consisting of a set of nodes and links. Nodes store information and are connected by links that vary in strength. An activation process that spreads from node to node determines the degree of retrieval in consumers' memory. When other external information is encoded or when internal information is retrieved from long-term memory, one node activates associations with another node. Given this, the associated social initiative may lead consumers to perceive a company as possessing similar values (Janiszewski & Stijn, 2000).

The associative memory theory provides the basis for two different associations. The primary associations between company and its supporting cause are based on internal cues such as company- and cause-related attributes, benefits, and attitudes toward the cause since these

cues directly affect the company's evaluation (Broniarczyk & Alba, 1994). Therefore, primary associations tend to have strong links to the company because characteristics of the cause endorse the quality of the company indirectly. Primary associations include company- and cause-related attributes of, benefits of, and attitudes toward a cause. These primary associations are thus processed via a central route. Because of this, consumer attitudes will be more consistent and stable over time since the information processing relies on argument-based judgment.

On the other hand, consumers process secondary associations via the peripheral route or heuristic route since information processing is not based on argument-based judgments. As a heuristic cue, a simple judgment is drawn from some salient or otherwise readily accessible message or contextual cue (Meyers-Levy & Malaviya, 1999). Secondary associations are formulated by linking external cues that are not directly related to the company or cause, such as perceptual similarities (i.e., color, visual symbols; Keller et al., 2003; K. L. Keller & Aaker, 1992; Kuo & Rice, 2015). Even though primary associations, with their inherent self-relevance, can create the strongest memory links (Hertel, 1982), secondary associations allow consumers to simplify the evaluation of company-cause fit, especially in the absence of primary brand associations (Aaker & Keller, 1990). Meyers-Levy and Malaviya (1999) suggested that consumer judgments are likely to be affected by information that is relatively salient and easily accessible, and that comes readily to the mind at the time of judgment formation. Also, Campbell and Kirmani (2000) found that when consumers are cognitively overloaded, they are more likely to rely on salient and easily accessible cues in their memory.

Company-cause Fit and Consumer Response to CSR

Fit is an important factor in CSR because stakeholders often expect a company to engage in social issues that logically connect with the corporate activity as well as fit influence

consumer attribution thinking on a company's CSR (Du et al., 2010; Ellen et al., 2000; Menon & Kahn, 2003; Yoon et al., 2006). The literature highlights several key factors about that how the levels of company-cause fit influence consumer response. First, the levels of a company-cause fit influence how many thoughts are prompted in people (e.g., increased elaboration about the firm, the social initiative, and/or the relationship itself when perceived inconsistencies with prior expectations and information exist; Forehand & Grier, 2003; Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1994; Meyers-Levy et al., 1994). Second, the levels of company-cause fit generates a specific type of thought (e.g., low fit generates negative thoughts; Forehand & Grier, 2003; Menon & Kahn, 2003;). Lastly, the levels of company-fit influence the evaluations of the two objects (Johar & Pham, 1999; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Speed & Thompson, 2000).

A high company-cause fit creates consistency, less cognitive elaboration, which helps consumers to easily integrate the new knowledge into their existing cognitive structure (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006). Researchers even suggest that consumers use a high company-cause fit as a heuristic cue to positively evaluate a company's CSR. Consumers tend to selectively expose themselves to easily apprehensible external messages or contextual cues In such a way, consumers minimize how much they use their mental resources during information processing. From these heuristic cues, consumers generate simple inferences which represent deductions or generalized rules of thumb based on prior experiences. Suppose, for example, an IT company provides computers to schools in developing countries. Consumers may naturally consider the company-cause to be congruent due to the highly accessible association (i.e., using expertise to support the cause; Simmons & Olsen-Becker, 2006). In results, they may view the company's CSR as positive.

On the other hand, a low company-cause fit often increases elaboration about the company and its CSR. Menon and Kahn (2003) revealed that participants, in a low company-cause fit condition, generated a higher number of thoughts toward a sponsorship. Researchers have asserted that an increased cognitive elaboration often leads people to resist elaborating a message; it is thus more likely that they will resist being persuaded by the message (Petty, Cacioppo, & Goldman, 1981).

Researchers have also asserted that a low company-cause fit should make countering inputs accessible; this is because the unexpectedness of those relationships is often negatively valued (Mandler, 1982). For example, Simmons and Becker-Olsen (2006) indicated that consumers generated more negative thoughts when they were in a low company-cause fit condition. Researchers have generally argued that the discrepancy caused by poor company-cause fit encourages consumers to engage in attributional reasoning (Rifon et al., 2004) to understand the reason for the event (Weiner, 1985), such as a company's true motive in CSR (Campbell & Kirmani, 2000; Gilbert & Malone, 1995; Simmons & Johar, 2000). According to the two-stage model of attribution, people tend to first make relatively effortless inferences based on a surface meaning (e.g., a company with eco-friendly label is socially responsible). Then, if they allocate sufficient processing energy, people may "correct" their inference through a more effortful process that accounts for other accessible inputs (e.g., the eco-friendly label is not government certified). Likewise, a consumer may use only the surface meaning of a company's CSR as a good deed, yet when people find cues, like low fit, they might engage in further elaboration. Thus, it increases cognitive elaboration and it makes countering (negative) inputs accessible.

Accordingly, consumers evaluate a company and its CSR differently when there is increased elaboration and more access to negative thoughts due to an incongruence between a company and its supporting cause. Researchers argue that a high company-cause fit helps a company build clarity about what consumers may expect from it (Erdem & Swait, 1998; Keller et al., 2003; Park, Jaworski, & MacInnis, 1986; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006). Ellen et al. (2006) suggested that consumers react differently to cause-related marketing efforts based on the types of causes a retailer supports. Participants in their study evaluated a retailer more positively when the congruency of the donated product with the retailer's core business was high. Menon and Kahn (2003) found that higher congruence between the sponsor and the social issue led to favorable ratings for cause promotions when elaboration on the sponsorship activity was facilitated. Similarly, Sen and Bhattacharya (2001) suggested that consumers evaluate the company more favorably when a CSR activity is relevant to the company's existing products. For instance, respondents evaluated a company that manufactures calculators more favorably when it supported fair overseas manufacturing practices rather than when it supported women's and minority rights.

Within the psychology literature, there are many documented contexts in which perceived discrepancies lead to this type of elaborative processing (e.g., Clary & Tesser, 1983; Harvey, Yarkin, Lightner, & Town, 1980; Hastie, 1984). Similar effects of fit on attitudes have been found for brand alliances and extensions (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Boush & Loken, 1991; Broniarczyk & Alba, 1994; Simonin & Ruth, 1998). As consumers have been shown to be naturally skeptical of firm motives with regard to CRM initiatives (Vlachos, Koritos, Krepapa, Tasoulis, & Theodorakis, 2016), poor firm-cause fit will generally encourage attributions of self-serving motivations such as selfishness and reactivity. Simmons and Becker-Olsen (2006) also

suggested that consumers generated more negative thoughts when they perceived the company-cause fit to be low than high.

Previous research, however, reported mixed results of the effects of company-cause fit. While several studies found a main effect of company-cause fit on consumer evaluations of the firm associated with the sponsorship (e.g., Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Ellen et al., 2000; Pracejus & Olsen, 2004), other researchers did not find such an effect (e.g., Barone et al., 2007; Menon & Khan, 2003; Nan & Heo, 2007). Accordingly, this research examines the extent to which a company-cause fit influences consumer skepticism in their responses.

MESSAGE SPECIFIC-NESS

The concreteness effect is “the observation that concrete concepts are processed faster and more accurately than abstract concepts in a variety of cognitive tasks” (Jessen et al., 2000). In fact, the psychology literature has found consistent evidence of the concreteness effect. Nonetheless, previous research has shown it is difficult to define and operationalize the message concreteness concept as well as to vary the message-effect results. For example, concreteness is often simultaneously described by different words, such as vividness (Sterthal & Kisielius, 1986), specificity (Feldman et al. 2006), detailed information (Maheswaran & Sterthal, 1990), tangibility (Dube-Rioux, Regan, & Schmitt, 1990), and imageability (P. A. Keller & McGill, 1994). Therefore, this study attempts to build a sustaining theoretical framework to understand the message concreteness construct and its impact on CSR outcomes.

In general, researchers define message concreteness by adopting Paivio’s dual-coding theory (DCT). DCT is used to establish the extent to which a message evokes mental imagery. Nisbett and Ross (1980) similarly defined information concreteness as the extent to which “information may be described as vivid, that is, as likely to attract and hold our attention and to

excite the imagination to the extent that it is emotionally interesting, concrete and imagery-provoking, and proximate in a sensory, temporal, or spatial way" (pg. 45). Mackenzie (1986) defined information concreteness as "the degree of detail and specificity about objects, actions, outcomes, and situational context, is, in other words, one of the primary factors responsible for a message's vividness" (pg. 178). Although previous research has mostly relied on defining concreteness as evoking imagery (Babin & Burns, 1997; Das et al., 2016; Krishnan, Biswas, & Netemeyer, 2006), there is less research that points to factors that complicate the definition and operationalization of message concreteness.

Also, more recently, message concreteness is defined by using the linguistic category model (LCM) (Hansen & Wänke, 2010; Semin, Higgins, de Montes, Estourget, & Valencia, 2005; Spassova & Lee, 2013). LCM proposes that verbal descriptions differ in the level of linguistic concreteness versus abstractness. LCM distinguishes among several word classes that can be located on the concreteness–abstractness spectrum, based on the degree of perceptual features of the event (Semin et al., 2005). The more abstract the term is the adjectives have less observable features. It is often argued that concrete concepts represent physical entities, defined by spatial boundaries and perceivable attributes. Scholars contend, however, that distinguishing concreteness through the physicality of a concept is unsatisfying. After all, such a method characterizes abstract concepts only by exclusion (i.e., "not physical") without accounting for graded differences in concreteness (Wiemer-Hastings & Xu, 2005). For example, most people perceive the term scientist to be more abstract than the term milk bottle, but both are perceivable physical entities. Likewise, most people perceive notion as more abstract than ambiance, but neither is a perceivable physical entity. These gradual variations have been associated with

differences in processing and are thus essential to consider in any accounting of concept representation.

Alternatively, borrowing from Rosch's (1978) hierarchical categorization, we can define message concreteness as a message varying in terms of the graded notion of abstractness-concreteness, which that refers to generic versus specific information (e.g., Feldman et al., 2006; Johnson & Kisielius, 1985; Macklin et al., 1985; Spreen & Schulz, 1966; Johnson & Fornell, 1987; Wiemer-Hastings & Xu, 2005).

Furthermore, studies not only employed different theoretical frameworks for message concreteness but also carried out studies with less clarity on how the construct is operationalized. For example, Mackenzie's (1986) study defined message concreteness as information capable of evoking imagery. However, it is questionable whether the study manipulated only the advantage of the imagery-evoking information as opposed to the level of information specificity. For example, the study manipulated “many breakdowns” versus the “3 out of every 4 watches have breakdowns.” When it comes to activating visual imagery, it is unclear whether the latter phrase (i.e., concrete) has an advantage over the former phrase (i.e., abstract).

Lastly, the message concreteness results varied across many studies. Many marketing communication studies have found evidence of the enhanced message effect due to concreteness (Dickson, 1982; Fernandez & Rosen, 2000; MacKenzie, 1986; Percy, 1982). Previous research found that advertising messages incorporating explicit information require less cognitive effort to process (Bettman, Luce, & Payne, 1998). Prior research suggests that abstract claims are more likely to inhibit the ability of those exposed to advertisements to envision the salient characteristics of the concepts being promoted. Likewise, decreasing message specificity has been shown to detract from claim believability and increase negative attitudes toward both the

message and the message source (Snyder, 1989). MacKenzie (1986) found that ads with more concrete copy attracted more attention to focal attributes than ads with an abstract copy.

Abernethy and Franke (1996) concluded that the extant evidence on consumer attitudes indicates that advertising that presents differentiating brand information is more effective in assisting consumer decision making. Vividly described information has more of an impact on judgments than merely giving raw facts (Borgida & Nisbett, 1977). Concrete details can make the information contained in a persuasive message seem more relevant (Bar-Hillel, 1980).

In contrast, several prior studies have shown that no evidence of the concreteness effect (Andreoli & Worchel, 1978; Borgida, 1979; Kisielius & Sternthal, 1984; Reyes, Thompson, & Bower, 1980). Reyes, Thompson, and Bower (1980) found that a concrete message induced greater influence than an abstract message, but this result emerged only in a delayed posttest condition. Chaiken and Eagly (1976) observed a vividness effect, but only in the form of an interaction with the degree of difficulty of the message. That is, an audiovisual message had greater influence than an audio or print appeal when the communication was easy to comprehend. When the message was difficult to understand the print message induced more advocacy-consistent opinion change than audiovisual and audio conditions combined. Andreoli and Worchel (1978) found a vividness effect only in an interaction with communicator credibility. Audiovisual information induced a more favorable judgment of the advocacy than the audio or written information when the communicator was credible, but when the communicator lacked credibility, people formed a less favorable judgment. Moreover, recent research from Deval, Mantel, Kardes, and Posavac (2012) suggests that more specific information was more effective only for consumers with a low level of product knowledge. Therefore, research has produced varying results in message concreteness without clearly defining the boundary effect.

The goal of this dissertation is to delineate the theoretical construct of message concreteness and extend this effect in the CSR context by delving into underpinning theories of concreteness and reviewing past research of message concreteness in marketing communication.

The Concreteness Effect

According to the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, concrete means “actual” or “existing in reality,” whereas abstract is defined as “apart from concrete existence” (Houghton, 2000). The concreteness effect is defined as “the observation that concrete concepts are processed faster and more accurately than abstract concepts in a variety of cognitive tasks.” (Jessen et al., 2000). The effect of concreteness is delineated by several competing theories – dual-coding theory, context-availability theory, availability-valence theory, and hierarchical categorization.

Dual-Coding Theory (DCT)

Dual-coding theory (DCT) postulates the existence of two coding systems—a verbal one (consisting of verbal associates) and an imaginal one (consisting of images). The former represents and processes language, and the latter processes nonlinguistic objects and events. The imaginal system is frequently referred to as the imagery system or code because its functions include the generation, analysis, and transformation of mental images (Sadoski & Paivio, 2004). The two systems are functionally separate.

The accessibility of these systems depends on the concreteness of the linguistic input. Superior performance of concrete materials is attributed to the greater availability of the imaginal code for these types of stimuli. Specifically, this theory posits that people can associate concrete concepts with particular visual images more easily than they can with abstract concepts. The concrete concept is likely to be processed by both systems, whereas the abstract concept is likely

to be processed only to the verbal system. The theory was empirically constructed and tested from the outset using operational procedures to access and use nonverbal and verbal mental codes. The ultimate classes of procedural defining variables included stimulus attributes, experimental manipulations (e.g., task instructions), individual difference tests, neural correlates, and subjective reports. The signature DCT features are the referential interconnections that enable “Nonverbal mind and verbal mind [to be] interlocked in a synergistic relation that evolved into the nuclear power source of our intellect” (Paivio, 2014, pp. 3–4).

Research suggests that concepts processed by both systems are more likely to be learned and better recalled (Paivio, 1971), recognized (Begg & Paivio, 1969), and comprehended (Holmes & Langford, 1976; Moeser, 1974) than concepts that are processed by only one system (Klee & Eysenck, 1973; Paivio, Yuille, & Madigan, 1968). DCT research found evidence that concreteness is highly correlated with the “imageability ratings” (i.e., imageability is likely associated with conceptual characteristics that afford imagery; Paivio, 2014). Therefore, DCT assumes a qualitative difference between abstract and concrete concepts and holds that concreteness effects are due to abstract concepts lacking a perceptual representation (Paivio, 1969, 1971, 2014).

Although the dual-coding model posits that the imaginal code is appropriate for storing concrete information in memory, the model is ambiguous as to whether the imaginal code is useful during comprehension. Paivio (1971) found no evidence suggesting that concrete sentences are understood faster than abstract sentences.

Contextual-availability Theory

The context availability model (discussed by Kieras, 1978) was developed for purposes other than explaining imagery effects. This model states that comprehension processes in

language are aided in an important way by the addition of contextual information to the materials that are to be understood (Bransford & Johnson, 1972; Bransford & McCarrell, 1974). This contextual information may come either from the stimulus environment or from the world knowledge of the person who is comprehending. This enables the person to discern the necessary relations among concepts in the incoming message. Comprehension of the meaning of the message takes place when the person is able to make these kinds of cognitive contributions (Bransford & McCarrell, 1974). If the person is unable to make the appropriate cognitive contributions, then the message is meaningless and naturally difficult to remember. Comprehending, therefore, is intimately related to the ability of the person to provide a context for the linguistic message (Schwanenflugel & Shoben, 1983).

According to the context-availability theory, concrete words have the cognitive advantage over abstract words not because of the superiority in activating visual imagery but because of the contextual knowledge or information that is inherently associated with concrete versus abstract words (Bransford & Johnson, 1972; Bransford & McCarrell, 1974; Schwanenflugel & Shoben, 1983). Specifically, this model posits that concrete nouns automatically activate more associative information, resulting in faster recognition of these items. Abstract sentences presented in isolation are less easily comprehended than concrete sentences (as found by Holmes & Langford, 1976). For abstract materials, people have greater difficulty determining appropriate contextual information. It is very easy to identify, for example, the appropriate context for a sentence that includes concrete concepts, such as “Jack looked in his binocular to see the burning forest.” There is little ambiguity in this sentence regarding the appropriate context. In contrast, the appropriate context is not clear in a sentence that includes abstract concepts, such as “The group talks about how to solve the issue.” This

latter sentence's meaning can vary depending on various contexts. Given that contextual information is important in concreteness, a meaningful context with sufficient verbal information of abstract nouns will be processed in a similar fashion as one of concrete nouns (Schwanenflugel & Stowe, 1989).

This difference enables concrete materials to be more completely represented in memory, thereby resulting in superior learning, recall, and recognition for these types of stimuli (Schwanenflugel & Shoben, 1983). Bransford and McCarrell (1974) discussed a study in which subjects were given paired associates where the abstract stimulus items were either meaningfully related or unrelated to the response pairs. It was shown that when abstract stimulus items were meaningfully related to the response pairs (e.g., hindrance: wheelchair-stairway), then they were recalled as readily as concrete stimulus items.

Schwanenflugel and her colleagues (1983) have presented two sources of evidence that they argue favor the context-availability theory. First, Schwanenflugel and various colleagues (e.g., (Schwanenflugel, 1991; Schwanenflugel, Harnishfeger, & Stowe, 1988; Schwanenflugel & Shoben, 1983; Schwanenflugel & Stowe, 1989) found a correlation between concreteness ratings and participants' estimates of the relative difficulty of retrieving associated contextual information for isolated abstract and concrete words (context availability ratings). Moreover, they found that these context-availability ratings were a better predictor of lexical decision performance than rated concreteness or imageability. When concrete and abstract words were equated on this variable, the advantage normally seen for concrete words was no longer significant. One potentially serious problem with these studies, however, is that it is not clearly how participants actually made context-availability ratings. In particular, the authors of these studies apparently did not check to see if participants might have sometimes used some type of

imagery strategy. It might be, for example, that for concrete words and even for some abstract words, many participants used mental images to help determine how easy or how many different contexts a word can be used in. Thus, partially out-rated concreteness might have missed an important residual dimension of concreteness or imagery. To eliminate this possibility, participants' actual generated contexts would have to be monitored and controlled for image-based intrusions.

In addition, the postulated differences in the availability of context information in memory are neither well understood, nor have they received a satisfactory explanation. Finally, the ease of prediction account assumes that predicates of concrete or highly imageable words are easier to generate (Jones, 1985). However, correlations of these variables are inconclusive because it is possible that concreteness or imageability considerations enter into the processes of rating ease of prediction (cf. de Mornay Davies & Funnell, 2000).

In a second series of experiments Schwanenflugel and colleagues (e.g., Schwanenflugel et al., 1988; Schwanenflugel & Shoben 1983; Schwanenflugel & Stowe, 1989) more convincingly demonstrated that when sufficient supportive context is provided, either in the form of several or even a single prior sentence, concreteness effects on accuracy and reaction times diminish or even vanish in a variety of tasks. These tasks included lexical decisions, naming, and judging sentence meaningfulness. This effect takes the form of context producing large changes in performance on abstract items but on concrete items little or no change in performance. Schwanenflugel and colleagues (1989) argued that this implies that the concreteness effect is reducible to differences in the availability of context. In other words, abstract words are processed as efficiently as concrete words when they are provided with an external context, such as a supportive sentence stem, of equivalent potency to that normally available to concrete words

from through semantic memory. Concrete words do not benefit as much from an external context because they already have strong built-in contexts, so an external context does little to change how these items are processed. According to this view, there is no need to postulate a more architecturally complex separate system for representing and processing imagistic information.

Although this theory has not been widely adopted in advertising research, a similar theory has been proposed in the marketing literature. The vividness of an ad copy is not determined by whether the copy includes abstract or concrete concepts; it is determined by the cognitive process it evokes (Kisielius & Sternthal, 1984). Specifically, people normally process an ad copy by relating it to relevant information they have stored in memory. During the process, people do not access all the information they have stored; they access only the information that is most available (Anderson & Bower, 1974; Tversky & Kahneman, 1973).

Availability-valence Hypothesis

According to Kisielius and Sternthal (1984), concreteness effect effect may be explained by cognitive elaboration, which refers to the number of associative pathways in memory that imply a particular concept (Anderson & Bower 1974; Nisbett & Ross 1980). Thus, the availability-valence hypothesis posits that the greater the number of associative pathways, the more easily an individual can access information. In the previous theories, concreteness was viewed as a characteristic of the stimulus; thus, pictures are vivid and verbal statements are pallid (e.g., Taylor & Thompson, 1982). However, this theory posits that concreteness is the process by which the stimulus evokes cognitive elaboration of stimulus-relevant information in memory. Consequently, an ad copy that leads people to engage in more elaboration should make the message more vivid (i.e., concrete). Therefore, such elaboration may either enhance or

undermine advocacy-consistent judgments, depending on the favorableness of the information elaborated.

Concreteness as Hierarchical Categorization: Superordinate-Subordinate Concepts

Scholars approach abstract and concrete concepts in the graded notion of a concreteness-abstractness continuum. That is, rather than approaching concepts that are distinctive in nature, concepts are categorized hierarchically in a graded notion of abstractness-concreteness.

Borrowing from Rosch's (1978) conceptualization of superordinate, concepts are categorized in a system that is related to one another by means of class inclusion (i.e., taxonomy). The greater the inclusiveness of a category within a taxonomy, the higher the level of abstraction. Likewise, Wiemer-Hastings and Xu (2005), building on the notion of schema (Minsky, 1975; Schank & Abelson, 2013), viewed abstract concepts as content-free schema, which consist of empty mental slots that are interrelated. Then, as people fill the slots in the schema with specific content in different situations, they may also specify an abstract concept in different situations.

In consumer research, scholars also posit that abstract attributes of an object need to be inferred or computed from concrete attribute information, whereas concrete attributes are directly associated with the object (Howard, 1977; Johnson & Kisielius, 1985). For example, Olson and Reynolds (1983) assumed that consumers derive the presence of abstract attributes from the presence of concrete attributes. Grunert and Grunert (1995) assumed that the link between concrete and abstract attributes is one of "subjective causality" (p. 211) and Pieters, Baumgartner, and Allen (1995) felt that concrete targets follow from abstract ones. The underlying reasoning for these different viewpoints range from mechanistic to intentional, but these authors generally believe that abstract attributes are inclusive of concrete attributes. Johnson and Fornell (1987) also found that consumers tended to describe more superordinate

products using more abstract attributes but described more subordinate products using more concrete attributes; For example, consumers may consider an automobile's safety attribute as more abstract than its airbag attribute. Then, it is likely that consumers describe an automobile's performance on the safety attribute as a degree but its performance on the airbag attribute as either "included" or "not included" (Johnson & Kisielius, 1985). Johnson and Kisielius (1985) contended that dimensions are continuous attributes on which objects differ as a matter of degree, and that features are dichotomous attributes that an object either has or does not have (Garner, 1978; Tversky, 1972). Therefore, the hierarchical categorization is similar to the superordinate-basic level distinction drawn in the categorization literature (Mervis & Rosch, 1981; Rosch, Mervis, Gray, Johnson, & Boyes-Braem, 1976).

Based on these theories, message concreteness varies in the extent to which it describes a concept in the graded differences in abstractness-concreteness. The notion of abstractness-concreteness may refer to another aspect of a concept—generality-specificity (e.g., Feldman et al., 2006; Johnson & Kisielius, 1985; Macklin et al., 1985; Spreen & Schulz, 1966).

Message Specific-ness in Marketing Communication

Operationalizing Message Specific-ness in Ads

As shown above, the alternative view of the abstractness-concreteness of a concept based on the notion of graded abstraction has enhanced our knowledge of how consumers categorize products and describe their performance on attributes. Researchers have also employed this view to examine the issues about the abstractness-concreteness of an ad copy (e.g., Borgida, 1979; Dickson, 1982; Hamill, Wilson, & Nisbett, 1980).

Previous marketing communication research widely employed the DCT to examine the message concreteness effect, yet studies have confused the application of vividness and

specificity of ad information. For example, in MacKenzie's (1986) study, the concreteness of each ad was manipulated by changing the wording of its text, resulting in a concrete and an abstract version. These were designed to be equal in the total number of words used (177), the average word length (4.3 letters), and the probative value of the reasons given for the importance of water resistance. The meaning and the argument across the stimuli stayed consistent. Their manipulation focused on evoking visualization, such as an abstract version with "water" versus a concrete version with "moisture." There are many places in the information, where evoking the visual is questioned. For example, the abstract information of "many breakdowns" versus the concrete version of "3 out of every 4 watch breakdowns" is not clear whether the latter phrase (i.e., concrete) has an advantage over the former phrase (i.e., abstract) in activating visual imagery. By nature, the latter phrase is a specific incidence of the former phrase. Therefore, the former phrase may activate as much visual imagery of watch breakdowns as the latter phrase as long as people can specify a certain incidence of the former phrase (e.g., 2 out of 3, 4 out of 5, and so forth). Therefore, the phrases "many watch breakdowns" and "3 out of every 4 watch breakdowns" can be considered to differ in terms of the generality-specificity rather than the extent to which a concept activates visual imagery. Similarly, manipulating abstract information as "tested in considerable depth" (abstract) and concrete information as "to 175 meters or more" does not seem to gain advantage from visual imagery. The concrete version gives more detail by saying "to 175 meters or more."

Confounding Effects

Qualitatively different features in abstract and concrete concepts. Scholars posit that there are qualitatively different features found in abstract and concrete concepts. Barsalou (1999) suggested that the more abstract a concept is, the more introspective features (i.e., emotions,

feelings, etc.) tend to be associated with the concept. Introspective processing is distinguished in three ways—representational states, cognitive operations, and emotional states. The first one includes the representation of an entity or event in its absence, as well as construing a perceived entity as belonging to a category. Cognitive operations include rehearsal, elaboration, search, retrieval, comparison, and transformation. Emotional states include emotions, moods, and affects.

In contrast, the more concrete a concept is, the more perceptual features tend to be associated with the concept. Abstract concepts are relational concepts (Markman & Stilwell, 2001). Abstract concepts may be semantically impoverished, deriving their meaning primarily from their associations with other words (Paivio, 1971, 1990; Plaut & Shallice, 1993). In other words, many abstract concepts are relational concepts that are characterized by their links to external concepts rather than intrinsic properties (Gentner, 1981; Markman & Stilwell, 2001). Therefore, people prefer using abstract versus concrete concepts in relation with contextual entities, such as social situations, behaviors, agents that are involved in activities, and so on (Hampton, 1981; Wiemer-Hastings & Xu, 2005).

Consumer level of knowledge. Previous studies on message concreteness did not consider the level of consumer knowledge about the product and the skill to process the message. Consumer knowledge of the product can influence how consumers perceive the message. For example, Dickson (1982) manipulated concreteness through different reports on refrigerators that were presented to subjects with either concrete case-history information or abstract base-rate information. In the case-history condition, actual quotes of five housewives were presented concerning the failure of their refrigerators. In the base-rate condition, more abstract information was presented in the form of summary statistical reports of 500 housewives. Relative to the base

rate information, the presentation of the case-history information led to an increase in the recall of the information and to higher failure-frequency judgments. Again, statistical data can create confounding effects on measuring the message concreteness effect. Moreover, to interpret the base rate information, the subjects needed to have basic knowledge about how to interpret statistical data. Without testing the subjects' prior knowledge in this regard then, the observed advantage of the case-history information over the base-rate information might have resulted from the ease of processing the information instead of the concreteness of the information (Kisielius & Sternthal, 1984). In addition, MacKenzie (1986) did not control consumer knowledge, which can influence how consumers process messages like "3 out of every 4 watches." Deval et al. (2012) suggested that consumers with low knowledge are more likely to respond favorably to messages that are detailed or have jargon messages although they cannot process the messages. Thus, it is questioned whether knowledge influenced the result.

The Amount of Information Comprehended. The amount of information is confounded with the dimension of concreteness-abstractness; one cannot separate the two to determine the reason for the significant effects (Macklin et al., 1985). For example, Rossiter and Percy's (1978) study, the concrete message is manipulated to be superlative and explicit, of the "factual documentation" type. The text for the concrete copy was: "Bavaria's Number 1 Selling Beer for The Last 10 Years; Winner Of 5 Out Of 5 Taste Tests In The U.S. Against All Major American Beers And Leading Imports; Affordably Priced At \$1.79 Per Six-Pack Of 12 Oz. bottles." On the other hand, the abstract copy was designed to present the same copy points in superlative but vague form, of the more "emotional" type. The text for the abstract copy was: "Bavaria's Finest Beer; Great Taste; Affordably Priced." This study did not control the length of the information. The amount of information comprehended can create a confounding effect on message

concreteness. Therefore, it is not clear whether the enhanced attitudes toward the product were caused by the concreteness of the ad copy or the ad copy's greater amount of information.

(Macklin et al., 1985).

In addition, Feldman et al. (2006) examined the effect of concreteness in job advertisements. This study defined message concreteness as the degree of detail and specificity about objects, actions, outcomes, and situational context, and that it represents one of the factors most responsible for the extent to which a message attracts and holds attention (MacKenzie, 1986; Macklin et al., 1985). This study focused on the specificity of the information provided in the advertisement to manipulate the concreteness of an ad by also manipulating the amount of information provided on the job advertisements. The manipulation measurement used was as follows: (1) very little information to a lot of information and (2) very specific information to very general information. The result of the study may also be questioned if the informativeness was generated by the number of information provided or the concreteness of the information.

Syntax and information processing. Previous research also manipulated message concreteness by using the linguistic category model (LCM). According to Semin and Fiedler (1988), the level of abstractness of a social event also varies by the structure of the language. Followed by this, Lee, Keller, and Sternthal's (2009) followed this by manipulating message concreteness. The authors used LCM to convey the product's benefits (i.e., nouns, such as "speed, portability, reliability") versus more concrete linguistic categories to convey the same benefits (verbs and adverbs, e.g., "lets you store and retrieve data quickly and reliably wherever you go"; Carnaghi et al., 2008). Semin et al. (2005) manipulated abstract and concrete messages to find how different regulatory foci led to increase message effectiveness (in study 3). In their message concreteness condition, they manipulated the claim "Sports make your muscles and

bones stronger” to “Exercising strengthens your muscles and bones.” Researchers posit that the syntax of sentences may to some degree reflect the transient processing demands of lexical retrieval, suggesting an interaction between syntactic and lexical processing. Specifically, the syntactic structure of utterances appears to be sensitive to the accessibility of lexical information, with phrases containing more accessible information occurring earlier in sentences (Bock, 1986). Thus when the syntax of sentences is manipulated to test concreteness, there can be confounding effects from accessing this information to comprehend a message.

Based on previous research, this research intends to operationalize the conceptualization of message specific-ness in how a company communicates their CSR, and to examine its impact on how consumers evaluate a company and its CSR.

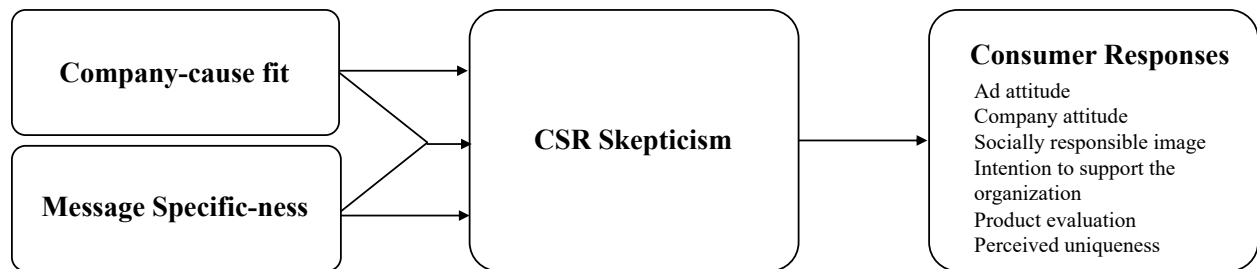


Figure 2.1. Proposed conceptual model

This dissertation carries out an overall examination of the theoretical framework of CSR communication by studying the levels of company-cause fit, message specific-ness, and consumer skepticism on how people evaluate a company and its CSR. For an illustration of this objective, see Figure 1.1. This dissertation will have three studies to examine the underpinning theoretical key variables in CSR.

CHAPTER 3. THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT

Perceived Company-Cause Fit and Consumer Response to CSR

An abundance of research has examined the construct fit. The general consensus is that when consumers perceive a higher congruence between the company and its supporting cause, they are more likely to respond positively to the firm and its social initiatives (Olsen et al., 2003; Pracejus & Olsen, 2004; Simmons & Becker-Olsen 2006). However, the existing cause-company fit literature often reveals that this traditional “match-up hypothesis” fails to appear (Nan & Heo, 2007), and some studies even reject this prediction in various research contexts (Barone et al., 2007; Ellen et al., 2000; Lafferty, 2007; Menon & Kahn, 2003; Trimble & Rifon, 2006). Moreover, research suggests that a company-cause fit often triggers skepticism that can lead consumers to think about the true motive of a company’s CSR (Rifon et al., 2004). However, research falls short of demonstrating the extent to which a company-cause fit influences skepticism or how much this skepticism impacts consumer response to a company’s CSR. Therefore, this study focuses on establishing a theoretical rationale to shed light on the role company-cause fit plays in consumer skepticism of a company’s CSR.

Perceived Company-Cause Fit and Skepticism

Researchers have argued that a congruency between the company and its supporting cause influences how consumers evaluate a company and its CSR. In general, when consumers perceive higher fit or similarity of the societal cause to the brand, they are more likely to generate a stronger association of the cause and brand and easily transfer their positive affect toward supporting the societal cause to the company/brand/product (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Hoeffler & Keller, 2002; Menon & Kahn, 2003; Rifon et al., 2004; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006). This is because the logical connection helps them integrate new information into their

existing cognitive structure such that it matches their prior expectations, knowledge, associations, actions, and competencies of a firm and a given social initiative (e.g., Home Depot and Habitat for Humanity). Accordingly, they view the sponsoring actions of a company as appropriate (Aaker & Keller, 1990; John et al., 1998; Keller, 1993; Mandler, 1982; Simonin & Ruth, 1998; Speed & Thompson, 2000; Till & Busler, 2000). Hence, a higher company-cause fit strengthens the connection between the firm and the social initiative (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Wojciszke, Brycz, & Borkenau, 1993) and enhances consumer attitudes towards the firm.

On the other hand, when consumers perceive that a company's sponsoring action is inconsistent with expectations, they are more likely to struggle to integrate the new knowledge into their cognitive structure (Meyers-Levy, Louie, & Curren, 1994; Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1989). According to the schema theory, a lack of congruence between a company and its supporting cause stimulates cognitive evaluation and elaboration (Hastie, 1984), and leads to more negative attitudes (Boush et al., 1994; Folkes, 1988a; Ford et al., 1990). Consistent with theories of persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty et al., 1981), greater elaboration yields greater resistance to the positive sponsorship message. Specifically, greater elaboration and resistance would elicit consumer judgments about the company's CSR initiative. Accordingly, consumers who elaborate an incongruity have diminished attitudes toward the firm and its initiatives (Forehand & Grier, 2003; Menon & Kahn, 2003).

In addition, researchers suggest that a low in company-cause fit generates more countering (negative) thoughts accessible (Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006). While consumers generate the processes-increased counterarguing, they are more likely to activate, or even strengthen, already existing consumer knowledge of self-serving corporate sponsorship motives and weaken beliefs in altruistic sponsor motives (Rifon et al., 2004) that is closely associated

with producing disbelief in/distrust of the company's claims (Obermiller & Spangender, 2001; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013). Conversely, a high-congruence sponsorship is likely to generate fewer elaborations than a low-congruence sponsorship. Hence, a high-congruence sponsorship could minimize the consumer's judgment or skepticism of the company's CSR motive, facilitating their acceptance of the company's CSR. The level of skepticism is higher when there is a mismatch between the cause and the firm (Forehand & Grier, 2003). Therefore, the following hypothesis is put forth.

H1. A company-cause congruence will generate less consumer skepticism than will a company-cause incongruence.

Perceived Company-Cause Fit and Consumer Evaluation

According to the affect transfer theory, people's preexisting affect associated with one object is transferred to a closely related object, toward which people may not hold prior affect (Shimp, 1981). That is, when a company supports a social cause that is perceived as congruent (i.e., as going well together; Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Bridges et al., 2000; Park et al., 1991; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006), the positive affect toward supporting a cause may be easily transferred to the message and the company (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Crimmins & Horn, 1996; Keller et al., 2003; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006).

Moreover, consumers look for a company to support a societal issue that is consistent with their expectations. According to researchers, the cognitive consistency strengthens the relationship between the company and the supporting cause that generates more favorable responses (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1989; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006). Consumers value consistency, which also permits them to cogently integrate the new knowledge (Boush & Loken, 1991; Broniarczyk & Alba, 1994; Das et al., 2016; K. L. Keller &

Aaker, 1992; Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1989; Miyazaki, Grewal, & Goodstein, 2005; Speed & Thompson, 2000). Therefore, a high company–cause fit may reinforce patterns of positive cues (Das et al., 2014; Miyazaki et al., 2005).

Conversely, when a company-cause fit is low, the experience of cognitive inconsistency gives rise to a host of problems; it generates more negative thoughts (Simmons & Becker-Olsen 2006). Previous research also indicates that the unexpectedness of low fit leads consumers to focus primarily on the dissimilar or negative cue and to tend to evaluate from that perspective (Ahluwalia, 2002; Campbell & Goodstein, 2001; Herr, Kardes, & Kim, 1991; Maheswaran & Chaiken, 1991). The increased elaboration concerns the sponsors and that this elaboration is negatively biased, leading to less favorable attitudes toward the company and its CSR (Boush et al., 1994; Das et al., 2014; Folkes, 1988; Ford et al., 1990; Miyazaki et al., 2005; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006). Given all this, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2a. A company-cause congruence will generate more positive attitude toward the ad than will a company-cause incongruence.

H2b. A company-cause congruence will generate more positive attitude toward the company than will a company-cause incongruence.

Moreover, the level of company-cause fit influences the degree to which consumers evaluate a company to be socially responsible. According to the cue congruency theory, consistent cues yield a cumulative positive effect, whereas inconsistent cues often lead consumers to focus primarily on the disparate or negative cue and tend to anchor their evaluation from that perspective (Ahluwalia, 2002; Campbell & Goodstein, 2001; Herr et al., 1991; Maheswaran & Chaiken, 1991). While consumers elaborate inconsistent information, they often generate negative thoughts or counter-intuitive thoughts that can serve as a cue for evaluating a

company's social responsibility (Menon & Khan, 2003; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006).

Research indicates that negative information or cues tend to influence consumer decisions more strongly than positive information (Ito, Larsen, Smith, & Cacioppo, 1998). In other words, negative thoughts engendered due to the low company-cause fit is likely to be transferred to how they evaluate a company's social responsibility. Accordingly, the level of company-cause fit influences how consumers perceive a company as socially responsible. Therefore, the following hypotheses are put forth:

H2c. A company-cause congruence will generate a more socially responsible image than will a company-cause incongruence.

H2d. A company-cause congruence will generate more supportive behavior intention toward a company than will a company-cause incongruence.

H2e. A company-cause congruence will be perceived as more unique than will a company-cause incongruence.

Researchers have continually argued that a company's CSR influences how consumers evaluate their product. For example, research has revealed that consumers prefer purchasing products from a more environmentally responsible company (Bortree, 2009). The level of the company's commitment toward environmental initiatives influences how consumers evaluate the company's product value (Mohr & Webb, 2005). Marketers often associate their product with social responsibility initiatives to gain competitive positioning (Du et al., 2007). They also prioritize sustainability because it produces superior gentleness-related attributes due to their ethical image (Luchs, Naylor, Irwin, & Raghunathan, 2010).

Prior research hints that a moral judgment invoked by CSR can permeate consumer judgment and decision making, such as product evaluation (Chernv & Blaire, 2015). Several

studies have reported a halo effect stemming from individuals' moral judgments that influence their judgments about food consumption (Steim & Nemeroff, 1995), politics (P. K. Smith & Overbeck, 2014), financial markets (Brown & Perry, 1994), and managerial decision making (Rosenzweig, 2007). More recently, researchers found that a product from a company engaging in prosocial activities is perceived to demonstrate superior performance to products without CSR (Chernv & Blaire, 2015). Chernv and Blaire (2015) contended that the positive spillover effect from a company's ethical actions as seen through their socially responsible initiative not only affects how consumers evaluate the overall company's image but also how they perceive the performance of the company's products. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2f. A company-cause congruence will generate more positive evaluation of a company's product than will a company-cause incongruence.

The Mediating Role of Consumer Skepticism on the Effect of Company-Cause Fit

The extent to which consumers respond to a company's CSR can be influenced by their skepticism of that CSR. In persuasion, the role of skepticism is seen as being 1) closely associated with forming attitude, 2) activating access to persuasion knowledge, and 3) a heuristic cue to discount the marketer's claim.

First, scholars suggest that persuasion is a function of accepting marketers' claims as true; this implies that a close association exists between skepticism and the message's persuasive effect (Calfee & Ringold, 1994; Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998). Prior research has generally observed that the more skeptical people are, the more negative they are toward advertising (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998). That is, the less skeptical a person is toward an ad the more favorable they are to it (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998). Researchers contend that ad skepticism provides a base to a consumer's attitude toward advertising in general (Obermiller &

Spangenberg, 1998). Moreover, researchers argue that highly skeptical consumers may be impossible to persuade by means of information or argument, for such consumers believe no stated claims (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998). Likewise, CSR skepticism is closely connected to forming attitudes toward the company, its message, and its CSR.

Furthermore, the persuasion knowledge literature suggests that skepticism triggers consumers to engage in more elaboration about the marketer's motive in an attempt to refine their attitude toward the company and their claim (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Prior research associates the role of skepticism as a trigger to access persuasion knowledge (Campbell & Kirimani, 2000) and attributional thinking (Forehand & Grier, 2003; Rifon et al., 2004; Szyman et al., 2004; Yoon et al., 2006).

Despite the fact that consumers try to find the true motive in a company's CSR (Forehand & Grier, 2003; Rifon et al., 2004; Szyman et al., 2004; Yoon et al., 2006), they are generally not motivated to process marketers' messages/claims in any deep sense (MacInnis et al., 1991). Thus, it is likely that consumers' state of distrust or disbelief toward a company's CSR may be used as a heuristic cue (MacCoun, 1998) to discount a company's CSR message or evaluate the overall company and its CSR. In addition, consumers often perceive negative information as being more diagnostic than positive information (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001; J. Cho, 2006). Hence, between a company's positive information (i.e., CSR information) and negative information (and the resultant skepticism), a consumer is likely to be influenced more by the latter. Therefore, skepticism is likely to negatively influence consumer response toward a company and its CSR.

Moreover, when consumers question the true motive of a company's CSR, it is more likely to harm the authenticity of the company's CSR, which is vital to producing a positive

outcome. Scholars postulate that what consumers know about a company can influence their overall evaluation of and attitudes toward the company's products (e.g., Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006). For example, when consumers believe that a company is concerned about the well-being of society and is committed to “doing good,” they tend to form favorable attitudes toward the company and develop a sense of attachment or connection to it (Stanaland et al., 2011).

However, when consumers are skeptical of a company's CSR, they may not be easily convinced that the company's genuine purpose of CSR is due to their socially responsible character or altruistic motives. Such feelings influence, in diverse ways, consumer response to a company's CSR, such as lowering the value of the retailer's name (Cho, 2006) and curbing their willingness to talk positively about the retailer to their friends and acquaintances (Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013). In other words, when consumers doubt, it is more likely to lead to negative responses because it diminishes the authenticity of a company's CSR.

Accordingly, a low company-cause fit leads consumers to engage in more cognitive elaboration, impacting the level of skepticism toward a company's CSR. When skeptical, consumers elaborate more about the relationship of the company and its supporting cause, making it more likely that they will rely on the feeling of distrust. This is because consumers are generally not highly motivated to process advertising messages (MacInnis et al., 1991).

Similarly, while consumers counter with a persuasion-coping response (Friestad & Wright, 1994), they are more likely to rely on the distrust that has been induced. Thinking of their distrust of a company's CSR is likely to lead them to conclude the company is not virtuous (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3. Consumer skepticism will mediate the effect of company-cause fit in H2.

Message Specific-ness and Consumer Response to CSR

Consumers often become skeptical of a marketer's claim (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 2001) due to their message strategies (Grau et al., 2007; Pracejus et al., 2003). In CSR research, prior studies have consistently produced evidence that a specific message strategy evinces more positive consumer response than a general message strategy (Atkinson & Rosenthal, 2014; Ganz & Grimes, 2018; Grau & Folse, 2007; Kangun & Polonsky, 1995; Kilbourne, 1995; Robinson & Eilert, 2018). Although researchers have focused on examining this construct, the conceptualization has been inconsistent (e.g., vivid-ness, concreteness, specificity, detail-ness) and few attempts have been made to examine, in CSR, message specific-ness related to key variable, such as skepticism and company-cause fit. Therefore, this research attempts to build a theoretical framework and examine the effect of message strategy to key variables in CSR.

Message Specific-ness and Skepticism

In the marketing communication and psychology literature, researchers have examined how consumers respond to a message that is concrete versus one that is abstract (Feldman et al. 2006; Hansen & Wänke, 2010; Kisielius & Sternthal, 1986; MacKenzie 1986; Maheswaran & Sternthal, 1990; Semin et al., 2005; Spassova & Lee, 2013). An abundance of research has shown evidence that concrete messages work better than abstract messages (Babin & Burns, 1997; Das et al., 2016; Feldman et al., 2006; Johnson & Fornell, 1987; Johnson & Kisielius 1985; Krishnan, Biswas, & Netemeyer, 2006; MacKenzie, 1986; Macklin et al., 1985; Spreen & Schulz 1966; Wiemer-Hastings & Xu, 2005).

Despite the fact that the conceptualization and operationalization of the message construct varied, numerous studies consistently found evidence of “the concreteness effect.” Researchers in the past defined concreteness as the extent to which a message evokes imagery,

and found that concrete messages produced more favorable consumer responses than abstract messages (Babin & Burns, 1997; Das et al., 2016; Dickson 1982; Fernandez & Rosen 2000; Krishnan et al., 2006; MacKenzie, 1986; Percy 1982). An ample amount of literature offers evidence of the concreteness effect in how people process messages. Prior studies indicate that concrete concepts have greater cognitive advantages over abstract concepts (Kroll & Merves, 1986; Paivio, 1971). Concrete messages are processed more easily (Hansen et al., 2008) and recalled more accurately (Borgida & Nisbett, 1977; Doest & Semin, 2005). Research suggests that consumers prefer the use of factual language with specific examples of CSR programs and achievements to general descriptions of CSR principles (Berens & Van Rekom, 2008; van Rekom & Berens, 2008). Therefore, a message that includes concepts that evoke more imagery positively impact how people respond to the claim.

Scholars have also investigated message effects that vary in their level of specificity (Atkinson & Rosenthal, 2014; Ci, 2008; Feldman et al., 2006; Ganz & Grimes, 2018; Macklin et al., 1985; Robinson & Eliert, 2018). These researchers found that consumers favored a specific claim over an abstract claim. Feldman et al. (2006) found that people perceived a job advertisement ad more informative when its message was more specific. Atkinson and Rosenthal (2014) suggested that a specific argument yields greater eco-label trust and positive attitudes toward the product and label source. Ganz and Grimes (2018) indicated that the more specific a message increased the perceived credibility of a green claim. Robinson and Eliert (2018) reported that a specific-message strategy produces more positive evaluations than does a general-message one. Therefore, evidence suggests that messages varying in their degree of message specificity influence consumer response.

More recently, researchers employed the linguistic concreteness model (LCM) to demonstrate differences between concrete and abstract statements (Hansen & Wanke, 2010). Researchers have posited that that a word that is more concrete encompasses richness of perceptual, semantic, and contextual details and the vividness of the memory (Akehurst, Köhnken, Vrij, & Bull, 1996; Darley & Smith, 1993; Schooler, Gerhard, & Loftus, 1986). With more vivid details, people classify their memories as more likely real instead of imagined (Schooler et al., 1986). Accordingly, individuals perceive linguistically concrete versus less concrete messages differently. This perception, in turn, it influences how they respond to messages.

Based on past research, this dissertation proposes that a company's CSR message that varies in its level of specific-ness influences how consumers form attitudes, supporting intentions, and evaluation of a company and its CSR. Prior research reveals that message strategies, such as donation quantifier employed in abstract terms influence how consumers respond to a company's philanthropic efforts (Olsen et al., 2003; Pracejus & Olsen 2002; Pracejus et al., 2004). Consumers also considered vague references as unacceptable and suspicious (Grau et al., 2007). Research also indicates that audience distrust can arise from a lack of clarity in green advertising (Kangun & Polonsky, 1995; Kilbourne, 1995). Elving (2013) argues that people are skeptical of CSR messages that are ambiguous and without proof. Following previous findings in CSR research, this study expects that CSR messages that may be characterized as having more specific-ness are likely to generate more positive consumer response. Hence, the following hypotheses are put forth:

H4. A more specific message will generate less skepticism of a company's CSR than will a less specific message.

H5a. A more specific message will generate more positive attitudes toward the ad than will a less specific message.

H5b. A more specific message will generate a positive attitudes toward a company than will a less specific message.

H5c. A more specific message will generate a more socially responsible image than will a less specific message.

H5d. A more specific message will generate more supportive behavioral intention toward a company than will a less specific message.

H5e. A more specific message will generate higher perceived uniqueness of a company than will a less specific message.

H5f. A more specific message will generate more favorable evaluation of a company's product than will a less specific message.

How Consumer Skepticism mediates the Effect of Message Specific-ness

As discussed in Study 1, consumer skepticism likely influences how consumers evaluate a company and its CSR. Skepticism is likely to lead consumers to question the authenticity of a company's CSR and possibly discount the company's CSR claim.

Furthermore, the specific-ness of a message is likely to influence how credible it and its source seems to consumers. Researchers posit that consumers become skeptical when a company fails to provide visible outcomes even as it actively promotes its own philanthropy (Rim, 2018). Consumers require companies to provide specific information that reveals whether the company is truly delivering their promises or putting their claims into actions (Grau et al., 2007). Scholars also contend that, through a claim's perceived credibility (Lutz, MacKenzie, & Belch, 1983; Pomeroy & Johnson, 2009; Tucker, Rifon, Lee, & Reece, 2012), claim specificity influences

consumer attitude toward the advertisement and the brand (Alniacik & Yilmaz, 2012).

Credibility of a claim is generally closely related to skepticism, and scholars often refer credibility (i.e., conceptualized and operationalized in terms of trust and belief) as the opposite of skepticism (i.e., conceptualized and operationalized in terms of distrust and disbelief) (Flanagin & Metzger, 2000; Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Isaac & Grayson, 2017). Accordingly, past research has produced evidence that credibility mediate the effect of message specific-ness on consumer response toward a company and its CSR. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6. Consumer skepticism will mediate the effect of message specific-ness in H5.

The Interaction Effect of Company-Cause Fit and Message Specific-ness

This dissertation proposes that company-cause fit and message specific-ness will combine to influence consumer response to a company's CSR. Specifically, message specific-ness moderates the effect of company-cause fit on consumer-related CSR outcome. That is, messages that are more specific will lessen consumer skepticism and generate more positive outcome in the low-fit condition. On the other hand, in the low-fit condition, messages that are less specific will lessen consumer skepticism and generate a more positive outcome. The literature suggests that the more specific the information is, the better the outcome of marketing communication. Nonetheless, the current research proposes that the effect is moderated when there is a lower company-cause fit. As proposed in studies 1 and 2, this effect is likely to be mediated by consumer skepticism.

How consumers respond to a company's CSR message will be shaped by the interaction of message specific-ness and perceived company-cause fit. The degree to which a message is specific will influence how consumers respond to a company's CSR at varying levels of perceived company-cause fit.

As the fit literature argues, the extent to which consumers consider a company and its supporting cause to be a good fit influences how people process the information. Consumers often generate more positive responses toward a company's CSR with a high company-cause fit because they are more likely to associate the new information into their existing knowledge (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Forehand & Grier, 2003; Menon & Kahn, 2003; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006). Moreover, a more specific message that entails vividness, familiarity, and tangibility is likely to enhance the perceived company-cause fit. When a message is more general, consumers are more likely to make additional inferences about the claim that are broad and abstract (Grau et al., 2007; Lim, Sung, & Lee, 2018). While consumers may have saved their cognitive energy from easily associating the company with its supporting cause high in fit, they are likely to become aware of general messages lacking evidence to support the company's CSR claim (Grau et al., 2007; Robinson & Eilert, 2018). Therefore, in a high company-cause condition, a specific message will work better than a general message.

However, a low company-cause fit is likely to generate more elaboration about the relationship between the company and its supporting cause. The inconsistency in the belief of a company and its social cause produces a greater number of thoughts that are negative (Menon & Kahn, 2003; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006). How consumers perceive the incompatibility of the two will be intensified when a company communicates with more specificity its socially responsible initiative. After all, a message that focuses on details is likely to affect how consumers construe the information (Trope, Liberman, & Wakslak, 2007). That is, a specific message may lead people to think more concretely about the issue (i.e., comparing or finding the link between the company and its supporting cause), leading them to focus on the details (e.g., an actual task to connect the distinctive features of food and art) that can often heighten the

perceived incongruity of the two (Liberman, Sagristano, & Trope, 2002; Torelli, Monga, & Kaikati, 2011; Trope et al., 2007). On the other hand, a message that is more general diminishes the effect of incompatibility of the low company-cause fit. This is because a general message is likely to elicit individuals to have a more abstract mind-set, such as focusing on a higher goal (e.g., a higher goal for the well-being of a community) that often lessens the perceived conflict between a two incongruent information. Moreover, messages that are less specific are often more general allowing room to include other concepts (Rosch, 1978) that help people process the inconsistent information more fluently.

Consider consumers who elaborate more relationship between a company and its CSR but with a lack of cognitive resources, such as knowledge (Alba & Hutchinson, 1997), contextual information (Shapiro et al., 1997), or cognitive capacity (Meyers-Levy & Malaviya, 1999; Malaviya et al., 1996). These consumers are likely to struggle to process information that could influence their interpretation of the relationship. According to research, the experience of ease in processing information influences psychological distance judgements. Alter and Oppenheimer (2008) suggested that when people struggle to process stimuli in the environment, they were more likely to interpret the world abstractly. Similarly, a general consumer that lacks knowledge and ability (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987) processes inconsistent information (e.g., a low company-cause fit) may adopt a more abstract mind-set (Alter & Oppenheimer, 2008; Liberman, Trope, & Wakslak, 2007; Trope & Liberman, 2003). Accordingly, this mind-set may likely influence how they consume messages.

Many researchers observed that the degree of commensurability of information abstractness influences information processing (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Lee & Higgins, 2009; Lee et al., 2009; Spassova & Lee, 2013). Specifically, research has continually shown evidence that

persuasion increases when a message framing matches the psychological state of the person (Wagner et al., 2009; Ziamou & Ratneshwar, 2003). This effect occurs because when a message exhibits a degree of abstraction similar to the psychological state of a person, the person is more able to grasp the information (Ziamou & Ratneshwar, 2003). The person then realizes that the same validation criterion applies (Albarracín, Wallace, & Glasman, 2004). This perceived compatibility then increases the likelihood of attitude change (Johar, Sengupta, & Aaker, 2005). Therefore, the following hypotheses are put forth:

H7. In the low-fit condition, participants will be less skeptical of a less specific message than a more specific message.

H8a. In the low-fit condition, participants will show a more favorable attitudes toward the ad for a less specific message than a more specific message.

H8b. In the low-fit condition, participants a more favorable attitudes toward the company for a less specific message than a more specific message.

H8c. In the low-fit condition, participants will show a more socially responsible image for a less specific message than a more specific message.

H8d. In the low-fit condition, participants will show greater intention to support the company for a less specific message than a more specific message.

H8e. In the low-fit condition, participants will perceive a company to be more unique for a less specific message than a more specific message.

H8f. In the low-fit condition, a less specific message will elicit more positive product evaluation for a less specific message than a more specific message.

The Mediating Role of Consumer Skepticism on the Interaction Effect of Company-cause fit and Message Specific-ness

As proposed in previous studies, the researcher expects that consumer skepticism will mediate the interaction effect of company-cause fit and message specific-ness on how they evaluate a company and its CSR.

The extent to which the level of company-cause fit influences how people process messages that vary in specific-ness is likely to influence the extent to which consumers become skeptical of a company's CSR. Researchers suggest that skepticism is closely associated with how consumers form attitudes toward a message and the company (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998). They further suggest that skepticism is often detrimental to producing effective CSR communication outcomes (Du et al., 2010; Szyman et al., 2004; Yoon et al., 2006). Accordingly, given that consumers are not motivated to process a company's CSR message in much depth, they are more likely fall into a negativity bias (Ito et al., 1998) that uses skepticism as a short cut to evaluate the overall feeling about the company and its CSR. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H9: Skepticism will mediate the interaction of company-cause fit and message specific-ness on consumer response.

CHAPTER 4. STUDY 1

METHOD

Research Goal

The goal of study 1 is to examine how varying levels of company-cause fit influence consumer response toward a company's CSR. The study also investigates how consumer skepticism mediates the impact of levels of company-cause fit on their evaluation of a company and its CSR. Study 1 has two independent variables—the level of company-cause fit and consumer skepticism toward a company's CSR. It has six dependent variables—attitudes toward the ad, attitudes toward the company, socially responsible image, supportive behavioral intention toward a company, perceived uniqueness, and product evaluation.

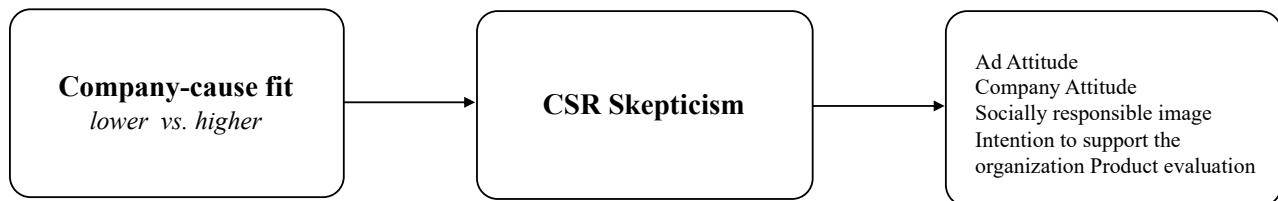


Figure 4.1. CC fit effect on consumer response mediated by CSR skepticism

Study Design

To examine the proposed hypotheses, a 2 (fit: high vs. low) x 2 (consumer skepticism: high vs. low) between-subject experimental design was conducted. Company-cause fit types (i.e., low and high) were manipulated while the consumer skepticism of a company's CSR was measured. To manipulate company-cause fit, this study created a fictitious company and devised two advertisements conveying different CSR initiatives. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions.

Sample Characteristics

Using a Qualtrics online panel, the researcher gathered a total of 101 participants. Of the 101, 44.6 % were male (N = 45) and 55.4 % were female (N = 56). The average age was 39.52

(SD = 12.65), and the range was from 18 to 77. The education levels of the sample were as follows: Having some college education were 22.8% (N = 23); 19.8% had a four-year college degree (N = 20), 15.8% had a master's degree (N = 16); 14.9% had a two-year college degree (N = 15); 12.9% had a high school/GED degree (N = 13); 7.9% had a professional degree (N = 8); 4% had a doctoral degree (N = 4, 4%); and 2.0% had less than a high school degree (N = 2). The ethnic composition of the sample was as follows: the vast majority were White (N = 80, 79.2%) followed by Asian (N = 7, 6.9%), African American (N = 5, 5.0%), Hispanic or Latino origin (N = 4, 4.0%), Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (N = 1, 1.0%), and Native American or Alaskan Native (N = 1, 1.0%). Lastly, subjects reported their income as follows: \$25,000 to \$49,999 (N = 23, 22.8%), \$50,000 to \$74,999 (N = 14, 13.9%), \$100,000 or more (N = 36, 35.6%), less than \$25,000 (N = 21, 20.8%), prefer not to say (N = 1, 1.0%), and \$75,000 to \$99,999 (N = 6, 5.9%).

Stimuli Development

The literature suggests that a company's perceived credibility affects consumers' responses toward the company's CSR (Lafferty, 2007; Newell & Goldsmith, 2001; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Yoon et al., 2006). A company with a bad reputation that promotes its CSR causes consumers to search for ulterior motives (Yoon et al., 2006). In addition, consumers may use their knowledge of a company's reputation to interpret ambiguous information about that company (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). To make sure that perceptions of organizational credibility would not influence the outcome, this study used a fictitious company as it examined the proposed hypotheses.

In the recent decades there has been increasing interest within the food industry in engaging in social and environmental responsibilities (Costanigro, Deselnicu, & McFadden,

2016; Rousseau & Vranken, 2013). Food is also one of the basic needs of a human being (Maslow, 1943) that is relevant to their daily needs – less varying levels of involvement in the product type. Therefore, a food company was selected for the fictitious company. To prevent subjects from creating meaning from a company's name, the researcher called the company Knip, a pseudo word (i.e., a unit of text that appears to be an actual word while no meaning is in the lexicon) (Keuleers & Brysbaert, 2010). To give a sense of Knip food, participants were provided a short description of the company:

Knip Foods is an American multinational company that produces protein-focused food, such as chicken, beef, and pork. Knip Foods provides protein to many national restaurant chains, including quick service, casual, mid-scale, and fine dining restaurants. In addition, Knip Foods sells prepared food products through all major retail distribution channels. (See Appendix A for more detail).

Pretest. A Company-Cause Fit

To select appropriate company-cause fit types (i.e., high versus low company-cause fit), a pretest was conducted. In this research, a fit is operationalized as the degree to which a consumer perceives congruence between a core operation of the firm and the nature of the cause it sponsors (Sen & Bhattacharya 2001; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006; Varadarajan & Menon, 1988). This compatibility or complementarity refers to the overall perceptions of the similarity of the company and its supporting cause, which implies the transferability of expertise or assets between a firm and sponsored cause (Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006). To check the extent to which fit is appropriately manipulated in the stimuli, the study adopted a fit scale, one that was originally developed by Speed and Thomson (2000). Participants were asked to respond to five

items on a 7-point Likert scale that measured perceived level company-cause fit (See Appendix E).

To make the CSR advertisement more realistic, the study selected topics based on findings from Cone research (2017) that consumers have expressed a desire to see companies to address topics, such as poverty, hunger health, and diseases, education, human rights, and, environment (Cone Research 2017; See Table 4.1 for detail).

After agreeing to participate in the study, to give participants a sense of the fictitious company's core business operation, a short description of Knip Foods was provided (See Appendix A for detail). Participants were then asked to rate each societal issue in terms of how similar or related the nature of the societal issue was to the company's core business operation. Then, the survey ended with a few questions that gathered demographic information.

A total of 40 subjects were collected through the Qualtrics online panel. Sampling results indicated that 67.4% responded as female (N = 27), 30.0% as male (N = 12), and 2.5% as others (N = 1). The average age was 41.00 (SD = 16.28) and the range was between 21 and 74. The education level of the sample was as follows: High school/GED (N = 11, 27.5%) followed by 2-year college degree (N = 9, 22.5%), Some college (N = 8, 20.0%), 4-year college degree (N = 6, 15.0%), Master's degree (N = 5, 12.5%), and Less than high school (N = 1, 2.5%). The ethnic composition of the sample was as the following: White (N = 30, 75.0%) followed by Hispanic or Latino origin (N = 4, 10.0%), African American (N = 3, 7.5%), and Asian (N = 3, 7.5%). Lastly, subjects reported their income as the following: \$25,000 to \$49,999 (N = 12, 30%), \$50,000 to \$74,999 (N = 7, 17.5%), \$100,000 or more (N = 7, 17.5%), less than \$25,000 (N = 6, 15.0%), prefer not to say (N = 5, 12.5%), and \$75,000 to \$99,999 (N = 3, 7.5%).

The internal consistency of company-cause fit scale was assessed with reliability analysis. The Cronbach's alphas for the measures can be found below in Table 4.1. Specifically, the study used Speed and Thomson (2000) 7-point Likert scale to select topics that are perceived as low versus high in company-cause fit (See Appendix B).

Table 4.1. Descriptive Statistics for CSR Topics in Pretest I

Topics	Mean	SD	Cronbach Alpha
Prevention of animal cruelty	4.77	1.53	.94
Advocating for healthy eating habits	4.97	1.48	.96
Supporting for hunger relief	5.40	1.33	.96
Providing nutrition education	4.93	1.56	.97
Advocating for educating equality	4.48	1.74	.97
Fighting against gender equality	4.00	1.69	.96
Advocating for the bullying	3.93	1.47	.96
Advocating for the art	3.87	1.51	.98
Advocating for racial equality	3.88	1.50	.98

The results indicate that participants considered supporting hunger relief showed the best fit with Knip ($m = 5.40$, $SD = 1.33$), and the lowest fit was advocating for the arts ($m = 3.87$, $SD = 1.51$) and fighting for racial equality ($m = 3.88$, $SD = 1.50$). Accordingly, supporting hunger relief was selected for the high-fit condition, and advocating for the arts was selected for the low-fit condition. In selecting topics related to low-fit, the researcher tried to minimize the effect of participants' prior knowledge and involvement that might influence how they processed information (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987; Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983). The issue of racial equality is today fervently debated and likely to be closely connected to participants' political views (Herndon, 2019). Accordingly, advocating for the arts was selected as it is relatively less linked to politics.

Two CSR corporate advertisements were created. For the high company-cause fit condition, the corporate advertisement conveyed information about Knip Foods supporting hunger relief. In the low company-cause fit condition, the ad conveyed information about Knip Foods advocating for the arts. Only the company-cause fit was manipulated; the length, meaning, font size, and location were kept the same across the different conditions. For more detail, see Appendix B.

Constructs

Independent Variables

There are two independent variables—company-cause fit and consumer skepticism. Fit is the degree to which a consumer perceives congruence between a core operation of the firm and the nature of the cause it sponsors (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006; Varadarajan & Menon, 1988). This compatibility or complementarity refers to the overall perceptions of the similarity of the company and its supporting cause. Such perceptions have implications for the transferability of expertise or assets between a firm and sponsored cause (Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006). To check the extent to which fit is appropriately manipulated in the stimuli, the study adopted a fit scale which was originally developed by Simmons and Becker-Olsen (2006). For six items regarding fit, participants were asked to respond on a 7-point semantic differential scale (See Appendix E).

In addition, the study measures participants' situational skepticism that occurs as they observe the company's CSR message. Consumer skepticism refers to the extent to which they develop distrust of or disbelief in a company's corporate social responsibility (Forehand & Grier 2003; Obermiller & Spangenberg 1998; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013; Webb & Mohr 1998). Consumer skepticism is operationalized as the extent to which consumers, while observing the

company's message, become skeptical of a company as being socially responsible. Consumer skepticism was measured on a 7-point semantic differential scale adopted by Skarmeas and Leonidou (2013; see Appendix G).

Dependent Variables

To understand participants responses toward a company's CSR message, the study adopted six dependent variables: attitude toward the ad (MacKenzie, Lutz, & Belch, 1986), attitude toward the company (Spears & Singh, 2004), socially responsible image (Berens et al., 2005; Brown & Dacin, 1997), intention to support the company (Coombs, 1999), product evaluation (Kim, 2014), and perceived uniqueness (Keller et al., 2003).

Attitudes toward the advertisement. Research suggests that attitude toward an ad is an important response that often leads to positive marketing outcomes (Batra & Ray, 1986; Cacioppo & Petty, 1985; Gardner, 1985; Mackenzie, 1986; MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989; Scott B. MacKenzie et al., 1986; Mitchell, 1986; Mitchell & Olson, 1981; Moore & Hutchinson, 1983; Olney, Holbrook, & Batra, 1991; Park & Young, 1986). Researchers argue that attitude toward an ad construct encompasses the evaluative reaction, affective responses and mood state (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989). In a CSR context, the association between a company and its supporting cause leads to affect transfer. That is, consumers' general positive attitudes toward supporting the societal cause could be transferred to a company's message (Nan & Heo, 2007). (See Appendix H).

Attitude toward the company. Research suggests that CSR-based positive associations about a company are likely to contribute in turn to a more positive attitude toward the company (Sankar Sen et al., 2006). Organizations with socially responsible images are perceived more positively and trusted more (Jahdi & Acikdilli, 2009; Swaen & Vanhamme, 2004). Research

suggests that making available to consumers more information about companies' socially responsible behaviors available to consumers is more likely to attract critical stakeholders (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990; Morsing & Schultz, 2006). Luo and Bhattacharya (2006) explained the direct influence of CSR on consumer satisfaction, in which a socially responsible company satisfies consumers via high levels of company-consumer identification. According to McWilliams, Siegel, and Wright (2006), CSR communication that generates a socially responsible image positively influences corporate reputation by evoking trust. It can be a signal of product or company quality. (See Appendix I).

A socially responsible image. One result of CSR communication is the company establishing a socially responsible image (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Maignan & Ralston, 2002; Sankar Sen et al., 2006). Companies employ CSR association strategies that “reflect the organization’s status and activities with respect to its perceived societal obligations” (Brown & Dacin, 1997, p. 68). Thus, consumers and the public construct a cognitive association between a company’s related CSR and the organization’s status and activities (Brown & Dacin, 1997); this leads to the formation of a socially responsible image. The petroleum industry, for example, often utilizes CSR-related mission slogans (e.g., Chevron’s “finding newer, cleaner ways to power the world”); these slogans generate a strong association with corporate identity (Verboven, 2011) (See Appendix J).

Supportive intention toward the company. Research has shown that stakeholders reward good corporate citizens (Porter & Kramer, 2006; Smith, Smith, & Wang, 2010). In terms of its effect on employees, CSR increases organizational commitment and job productivity and enhances the perception of corporate citizenship (e.g., Lin, Tsai, Joe, & Chiu, 2012). The investment in CSR initiatives is also known to be a source of competitive advantage and a way to

enhance corporate performance in terms of consumers (Porter & Kramer, 2011). Bhattacharya and Sen (2004) explained that the effect of CSR initiatives on consumer awareness or attitudes, which are “internal” outcomes – is significantly greater than their effect on outcomes “external” to the consumer, such as purchase behavior (See Appendix K).

Product evaluation. Corporate social responsibility is commonly viewed solely as a tool for enhancing company reputations and engendering good will among customers. In contrast, recent research has shown that the impact of corporate social responsibility can extend beyond public relations and customer good will to influence the way consumers evaluate a company’s products (Chernev & Blair, 2015). Among consumers, CSR tends to prompt moral judgments that can permeate all aspects of consumer judgment and decision making. Indeed, prior research has argued that morality and moral identity are central constructs guiding some of the key aspects of an individual’s cognitive and affective processes (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Kohlberg, 1981; Reed, Aquino, & Levy, 2007). In this context, a halo effect stemming from individuals’ moral judgments has been shown to influence their judgments across a variety of domains including food consumption (Stein & Nemeroff, 1995), politics (Smith & Overbeck, 2014), financial markets (Brown & Perry, 1994), and managerial decision making (Rosenzweig, 2007). Thus, a company’s CSR can influence not only its overall company image but also the perceived performance of its products. Indeed, consumers often perceive that the products made by companies engaged in prosocial activities are perceived to perform better than those of their non-engaged counterparts (See Appendix L).

Perceived Uniqueness. Socially responsible companies are distinguished from their competitors. Their socially responsible actions positively affect consumer attitudes toward the company and enhance consumer satisfaction (Pivato, Misani, & Tencati, 2008). Prior studies

have suggested that social responsibility is “a distinct brand personality dimension” (Madrigal & Bousch 2008, p. 538). Madrigal and Boush (2008) defined social responsibility as “an enduring, differentiating characteristic that describes a brand’s actions with respect to its obligation to the society at large, and the individuals living in that society” (p. 540). Studies have also shown that CSR attributions of the motives underlying a company's CSR initiatives affect consumers' brand perceptions (Du et al., 2010). Perceived uniqueness of a brand is an additional requirement for brand equity (Berry, 2000) (See Appendix M).

Procedure

An online survey was distributed through the Qualtrics online panel. The first page of the survey asked subjects to participate in the study. After they agreed to the IRB terms, subjects read a short description of Knip Foods. They were then randomly assigned to one of the two corporate advertisement conditions—either a high-fit condition (N = 44, 43.6%) or a low-fit condition (N = 57, 56.4%). After they saw the advertisement, they were asked to answer the manipulation check questions and then their skepticism toward a company’s CSR and dependent variable measures were measured. After all this, they were asked to answer a few demographic questions, were debriefed and thanked.

Analysis Method

Collected data was analyzed with the SPSS 25.0 statistical package. Frequency tests were used for data description. Also, reliability tests were used to develop the measurement. As major analysis methods, the study employed a series of independent sample t-tests and Hays’s Process (Model 4). First, reliability tests were conducted to extract relevant items. From Hypotheses 1 and 2, consumer responses were analyzed using a series of independent t-tests. And to examine

the mediating effects of skepticism (H3) on the effect of company-cause fit, the researcher performed a series of Hay's Process (model 4).

RESULTS

Reliability Analysis

Internal consistency of major constructs used in the study were examined and the results are shown in Table 4.2. Cronbach's Alpha given for consumer skepticism, attitude towards the ad, attitude towards the company, socially responsible image, supportive intention toward the company, and product evaluation. A series of reliability testing revealed that all measures were reliable (Nunnally, 1978).

Table 4.2. Reliability Analysis for Study 1

Measurements	# of items	Cronbach's Alpha
CC Fit	6	.89
Skepticism toward the company's CSR	4	.83
Attitude toward the Advertisement	11	.94
Attitude toward the Company	13	.96
Socially Responsible Image	5	.94
Supportive Intention Toward the Company	5	.95
Product Evaluation	5	.95
Perceived Uniqueness	4	.96

Manipulation Checks

The result of an independent t-test reveals that the two levels of CC fit were successfully manipulated. See Table 4.3 for more detail.

Table 4.3. Manipulation Check for Study 1

	CC Fit Condition	N	Mean (SD)	t-value	df	p	Cohen's d
CC Fit	<i>Lower CC fit</i>	44	4.25 (.92)	-8.22	99	$p < .001$	2.21
	<i>Higher CC fit</i>	57	6.20 (.84)				

The finding indicates a significant difference between a lower CC fit condition and a higher CC fit message condition ($M_{\text{low-fit}} = 4.25$ vs. $M_{\text{high-fit}} = 6.08$; $t(99) = -10.33, p < .001, d = 2.21$).

Hypothesis Testing

To examine the proposed hypotheses (See Table 4.4), this study performed a series of univariate hypothesis of independent t-tests. While the fixed variable was CC fit type, the dependent variables were skepticism, attitudes toward the advertisement and company, socially responsible image, supportive intention toward the company, product evaluation and perceived uniqueness.

Table 4.4. Proposed Hypotheses in Study 1

<i>Proposed Hypotheses in Study 1</i>
H1. A company-cause congruence will generate less consumer skepticism than will a company-cause incongruence.
H2a. A company-cause congruence will generate more positive attitude toward the ad than will a company-cause incongruence.
H2b. A company-cause congruence will generate more positive attitude toward the company than will a company-cause incongruence.
H2c. A company-cause congruence will generate a more socially responsible image than will a company-cause incongruence.
H2d. A company-cause congruence will generate more supportive behavior intention toward a company than will a company-cause incongruence.
H2e. A company-cause congruence will be perceived as more unique than will a company-cause incongruence.
H2f. A company-cause congruence will generate more positive evaluation of a company's product than will a company-cause incongruence.
H3. Consumer skepticism will mediate the effect of company-cause fit in H2.

The results show a significant difference between the two CC fit conditions on how subjects responded to a company's CSR message. Specifically, participants in a high CC fit condition display less skepticism of a company's CSR than those in a low CC fit condition. Thus, H1 was supported. In addition, subjects assigned to the high CC fit condition displayed the following compared to their counterparts in the low CC fit condition: more favorable attitudes

toward the ad and the company, considered the company as more socially responsible, indicated higher intention to support the company, evaluated the product more positively, and perceived the company as more unique. Hence, H2 was supported. See Table 4.5 for more detail.

Table 4.5. Descriptive Statistic and T-values

	CC Fit	N	Mean (SD)	T-value	df	p	Cohen's d
SKP	<i>Low CC fit</i>	44	4.05 (1.39)	6.97	99	<i>p</i> <.001	1.40
	<i>High CC fit</i>	57	2.18 (1.28)				
A _{ad}	<i>Low CC fit</i>	44	3.91 (1.10)	-6.44	98.90 ^a	<i>p</i> <.001	1.58
	<i>High CC fit</i>	57	5.65 (1.10)				
Ad _{Com}	<i>Low CC fit</i>	44	4.03 (1.09)	-6.26	99	<i>p</i> <.001	1.27
	<i>High CC fit</i>	57	5.66 (1.46)				
SRI	<i>Low CC fit</i>	44	4.49 (1.39)	-6.47	99	<i>p</i> <.001	1.24
	<i>High CC fit</i>	57	6.04 (1.09)				
SI	<i>Low CC fit</i>	44	4.80 (1.29)	-4.38	99	<i>p</i> <.001	1.27
	<i>High CC fit</i>	57	6.22 (0.92)				
PE	<i>Low CC fit</i>	44	4.73 (1.56)	-4.39	73.25 ^b	<i>p</i> <.001	.88
	<i>High CC fit</i>	57	5.92 (1.09)				
PU	<i>Low CC fit</i>	44	4.56 (1.53)	-4.24	99	<i>p</i> <.001	.84
	<i>High CC fit</i>	57	5.76 (1.32)				

a= Levene's test indicated unequal variances ($F = 4.29, p = .041$), so degrees of freedom were adjusted from 99 to 98.90.

b= Levene's test indicated unequal variances ($F = 6.37, p = .013$), so degrees of freedom were adjusted from 99 to 73.25.

In order to examine the role of consumer skepticism as a mediator on the impact of varying levels of CC fit on dependent variables, mediation analysis was performed by using model 4 in Hayes' PROCRSS macro. Each procedure inputted CC fit type as an independent variable, consumer skepticism as a mediator and dependent variables (i.e., attitudes toward the ad, company, socially responsible image, supportive intention toward the company, product evaluation, perceived uniqueness). The mediation analysis used 5000 bootstrapping to examine the possible indirect effect of the level of CC fit on dependent variables. The results reveal that consumer skepticism mediated the effect of CC fit on the following: attitudes toward the message ($R^2 = .51, F(2, 98) = 51.33, p < .001, b = -.56, SE = .08$), on attitudes toward the

company ($R^2 = .42$, $F(2, 98) = 36.11$, $p < .001$, $b = -.41$, $SE = .08$), socially responsible image ($R^2 = .41$, $F(2, 98) = 33.66$, $p < .001$, $b = -.33$, $SE = .08$), supportive intention toward the company ($R^2 = .21$, $F(2, 98) = 13.50$, $p < .001$, $b = -.28$, $SE = .11$), product evaluation ($R^2 = .23$, $F(2, 98) = 16.64$, $p < .001$, $b = -.31$, $SE = .09$), perceived uniqueness ($R^2 = .22$, $F(2, 98) = 13.66$, $p < .001$, $b = -.29$, $SE = .10$). See Table 4.6-8.

Table 4.6. Path Coefficients

		Path Coefficients							
		to SKP		to A _{Ad}		to A _{com}		to SRI	
		<i>b</i>	(se)	<i>b</i>	(se)	<i>b</i>	(se)	<i>b</i>	(se)
SKP				0.78	(0.08)***	0.78	(0.08)**	-0.33	(0.8)***
CC Fit	-1.86	(0.27)***		-1.86	(0.27)*	-1.86	(0.27)***	0.81	(0.25)**
				to SI		to PU		to PE	
				<i>b</i>	(se)	<i>b</i>	(se)	<i>b</i>	(se)
SKP				-0.28	(0.11)*	-0.29	(0.10)**	-0.31	(0.09)*
CC Fit				0.78	(0.35)*	0.66	(0.34)	0.6	(0.31)

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

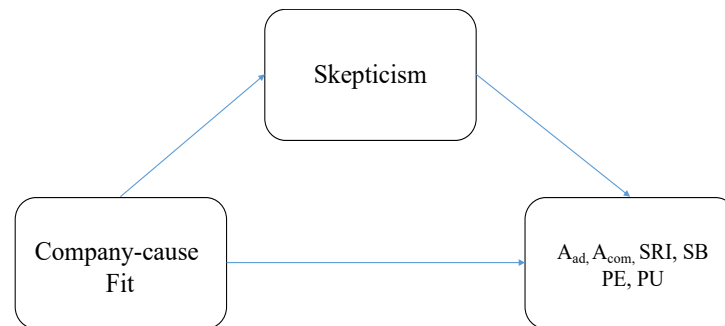


Figure 4.2. Skepticism mediated the effect of CC fit on Attitude toward the ad & company, socially responsible image, and intention to support the company

Consumer skepticism partially mediated the effect of CC fit on attitudes toward the ad and the company, socially responsible image, intention to support the company, product evaluation and perceived uniqueness. See Figures 4.2 for more detail. Thus, H3 was supported.

Table 4.7. Indirect Effects of CC fit on Dependent Variables via Skepticism (Mediator) (5000 Bootstrap Samples)

	Dependent Variables											
	Attitudes Ad		Attitude Company		Socially Responsible Image		Supportive Intention		Product Evaluation		Perceived Uniqueness	
	95% CI	Effect (SE)	95% CI	Effect (SE)	95% CI	Effect (SE)	95% CI	Effect (SE)	95% CI	Effect (SE)	Effect (SE)	Effect (SE)
CC fit	.668/ 1.543	1.041 (0.218)	.333/ 1.334	0.761 (0.250)	.059/ 1.191	0.584 (.307)	.004/ 1.123	0.525 (.284)	.059/ 1.191	0.584 (.307)	.057/ 1.128	.547 (.270)

Table 4.8. Mediation Analysis (Hayes's Process Model 4)

Model	R-square	MSE	F	df1	df2
CC fit → SKP	.33	1.77	48.57***	1	99
CC fit → SKP → A _{Ad}	.51	1.18	51.33***	2	98
CC fit → SKP → A _{Com}	.42	1.22	36.11***	2	98
CC fit → SKP → SRI	.41	1.02	33.66***	2	98
CC fit → SKP → SI	.21	2.07	13.50***	2	98
CC fit → SKP → PE	.23	1.57	16.64***	2	98
CC fit → SKP → PU	.22	1.88	13.66***	2	98

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

DISCUSSION

First, the results of study 1 reveal a significant difference in levels of consumer skepticism between two CC fit types (i.e., high versus low). The results suggest that CC fit influenced the extent to which consumers were skeptical of a company's CSR. Specifically, the findings show that subjects in the high CC fit condition generally exhibited less skepticism of a company as being socially responsible than people in the low CC fit condition.

This aligns to previous research postulating that a low CC fit generally contributes to greater elaboration, which often leads people to think about the marketer's true motives behind their socially responsible behavior (Campbell & Kirmani, 2000; Rifon et al., 2004). While people engage in more cognitive elaboration they are more likely to retrieve persuasion knowledge or intuitive beliefs about marketers' motives and tactics; they draw on these resources to interpret marketers' actions (Campbell & Kirmani, 2000; Friestad & Wright, 1994, 1995). That is, the incongruence of a CC fit is likely to activate or even strengthen prior knowledge (e.g., self-serving motives of companies in CSR) and weaken beliefs in altruistic motives (Rifon et al., 2004). Therefore, a low CC fit is likely to lead people to become skeptical of a company's genuine attempt to deliver value (Aaker, 1990; Keller & Aaker, 1992; Rifon et al., 2004).

Furthermore, the findings suggest significant differences in how participants responded to two types of CC fit. That is, the level of CC fit influences consumer attitudes toward the message and company, how they consider a company as socially responsible, intention to support the organization, product evaluation and perceived uniqueness of a company. The findings specifically disclose that the more consumers perceive a CC to be a match, the more they formed positive attitudes toward the message and the company. Moreover, when they perceived a CC fit as high, they considered the company to be socially responsible, showed stronger intention to

support the organization, and evaluated the company's product more positively. Scholars assert that a high CC fit often leads consumers to view the company's CSR initiative as appropriate because the new information can be easily integrated into their existing cognitive structure, which in turn strengthens the connection between the firm and the social initiative (Fiske & Taylor, 1991).

Alternatively, as revealed by prior research, the results imply that a low CC fit leads to less favorable attitudes toward the firm and its initiatives (Forehand & Grier, 2003; Menon & Kahn, 2003). Researchers speculate that a company's CSR is inconsistent with prior expectations, and actions lead to consumers having more difficulty in integrating new knowledge into existing memory structures (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006). Therefore, the lack of congruity is likely to reduce the clarity of the firm's market position and call into question the firm's motives (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Boush et al., 1994; Ford et al., 1990; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006). Accordingly, this study supports the notion that a high level of perceived CC congruency enhances positive attitudes towards companies/brands (Aaker, 1990; Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Keller & Aaker, 1993; Rifon et al., 2004; Simmons & Bekcer-Olsen, 2006; Simonin & Ruth, 1998; Speed & Thompson, 2000).

Lastly, the findings indicate that consumer skepticism is a significant mediator in the effect of CC fit on attitudes toward the message and company, socially responsible image, intention to support the organization, product evaluation and perceived uniqueness. That is, the higher the CC fit is, the less skeptical are consumers, leading to more positive responses. The lower the CC fit, the more skeptical are consumers of the company's CSR, leading to less favorable responses. Furthermore, whenever skepticism was increased, participants responded less favorably toward the company's CSR. The results imply that whenever skepticism is

available to consumers, they are more likely to use it as a cue to form their attitudes, intentions, and evaluations. This suggests the notion that skepticism discounts the effect of persuasion (Obermiller & Spandenberg, 2005) and negatively influences consumer response to a company's CSR (Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013). Theoretical and practical implications of the study are be discussed in Chapter 7.

Table 4.9. A Summary of Hypotheses Testing Results

Hypothesis	CC Fit	MSG	Prediction	Remark	Result
H1	All Types	Moderate	Higher Fit < Lower Fit	CC Fit effect on SKP	Supported
H2a	All Types	Moderate	Higher Fit > Lower Fit	CC Fit effect on A _{ad}	Supported
H2b	All Types	Moderate	Higher Fit > Lower Fit	CC Fit effect on A _{com}	Supported
H2c	All Types	Moderate	Higher Fit > Lower Fit	CC Fit effect on SRI	Supported
H2d	All Types	Moderate	Higher Fit > Lower Fit	CC Fit effect on SI	Supported
H2e	All Types	Moderate	Higher Fit > Lower Fit	CC Fit effect on PU	Supported
H2f	All Types	Moderate	Higher Fit > Lower Fit	CC Fit effect on PE	Supported
H3	Higher CC Fit	All Types	Fit → SKP → DVs	SKP mediates the CC fit effect	Supported

CHAPTER 5. STUDY 2

METHOD

Research Goal

The goal of study 2 is to examine the effect of message specific-ness on consumer skepticism, and to investigate the extent to which consumer skepticism mediates the effectiveness of a message's specific-ness on consumers' responses to a company's CSR. In study 2, there are two independent variables—messages varying in the degree of specific-ness, consumer skepticism toward a company's CSR; there are six dependent variables—attitudes toward the ad, attitudes toward the company, socially responsible image, supportive behavioral intention toward a company, product evaluation, and perceived uniqueness.

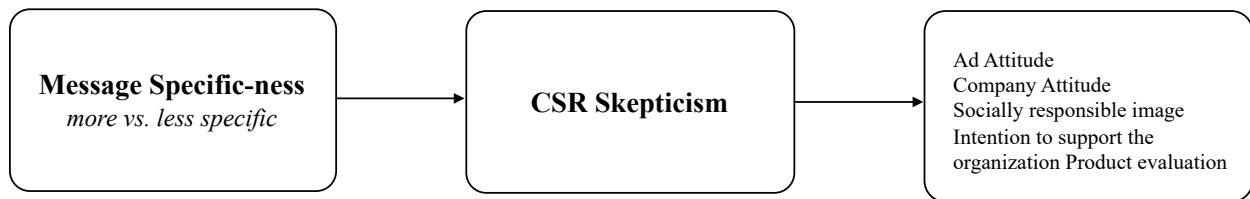


Figure 5.1. Message Specific-ness on consumer response mediated by CSR skepticism

Study Design

To examine the proposed hypothesis, the researcher conducted a 2 (message specific-ness: more specific vs. less specific) x 2 (consumer skepticism: high vs. low) between-subject experimental design. The message specific-ness is manipulated, and consumer skepticism is measured. This study created two advertisements conveying two CSR message types—a more specific and less specific CSR messages. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions.

Sample Characteristics

Using a Qualtrics online panel, the researcher gathered a total of 171 participants. Of these, 46.8% reported as male (N = 80) and 53.2% of the subjects reported as female (N = 91). The average age of the participants was 38.18 (SD = 13.16 range = 18-79). The education level of the sample was as follows: Having some college education (N = 37, 21.6%), a four-year college degree (N = 56, 32.7%), a master's degree (N = 23, 13.5%), a two-year college degree (N = 20, 11.7%), a high school/GED education (N = 13, 12.9%), a professional degree (N = 4, 2.3%), a doctoral degree (N = 3, 1.8%), and less than high school (N = 3, 1.8%).

The ethnic composition of the sample was as follows: the majority were White (N = 121, 70.8%), followed by African American (N = 25, 14.6%), Hispanic or Latino origin (N = 12, 7%), Asian (N = 4, 2.3%), Native American or Alaskan Native (N = 4, 2.3%), and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (N = 2, 1.2%). Lastly, subjects reported their income as the following: \$25,000 to \$49,999 (N = 46, 26.9%), less than \$25,000 (N = 39, 22.8%), \$50,000 to \$74,999 (N = 34, 19.9%), \$100,000 or more (N = 26, 15.2%), \$75,000 to \$99,999 (N = 20, 11.7%), and prefer not to say (N = 6, 3.5%).

Stimuli Development

To examine the effect of message specific-ness of a company's CSR messages, the study used the same fictitious company, Knip Foods. Moreover, based the results of study 1, the researcher selected the high CC fit condition to ensure that fit did not influence the effect of message specific-ness on subjects' responses.

Message specific-ness is operationalized as the extent to which a message uses concepts that are more specific versus less specific to describe a company's CSR. That is, a more general concept includes more concepts than a less general concept (e.g., a concept of resource includes

monetary and human work). A more specific concept is more likely to be included within a less specific concept (e.g., \$2 million is included in the concept of a large resource).

According to the operational definition, two messages were developed. For the more specific message condition, the message contained more specific information, such as what resources the company was giving (e.g., cash and employee volunteering); it mentioned a specific number, such as amount of their donation (e.g., \$2 million); it gave a specific time frame to show their continuous commitment (e.g., annually); it stated what they were supporting (e.g., increase operational efficiency in distribution); it noted how many food banks they were supporting (e.g., 100 food banks).

In contrast, for the less specific message condition, the message contained more general concepts. The message used a vague quantifier (e.g., donating large funds), gave a general routine to show their commitment (e.g., regularly); it stated ambiguously what they were helping (e.g., improve their ability in distributing); it gave a general utterance of how many they were supporting (e.g., many food banks; see Appendix C for detail).

Across the different conditions, the length, meaning, font size, and location were the same; only the message specific-ness is manipulated. The total number of words used for both messages were nearly equal (38 vs. 35) and the meanings were kept the same across the two conditions—Knip foods is advocating for hunger relief.

Pretest. Message Specific-ness

To select appropriate messages that varied the level of specific-ness of a company's CSR, the researcher carried out a pretest. Participants were first asked to rate their thoughts about the company's CSR message. To evaluate the extent to which subjects considered the message to be

specific, the study adopted a scale developed by MacKenzie (1986) with 7-point bipolar items (Cronbach alpha = .91; See Appendix F).

A total of 51 subjects were collected through mechanical Turk (mTurk). Of these 64.7% were male (N = 33), 31.4% were female (N = 16) and 2% other (N = 1). The average age was 34.2 ($SD = 10.95$), ranging from 18 to 63. The ethnic composition of the sample was as follows: Native American or Alaskan Native (N = 1, 2.0%), Hispanic or Latino origin (N = 6, 11.8%), African American (N = 1, 2.0%), Hispanic or Latino origin (N = 5, 9.8%), White (N = 33, 64.7%), and other (N = 4, 7.8%). Lastly, subjects reported their income as follows: Less than \$25,000 (N = 8, 15.7%), \$25,000 to \$49,999 (N = 11, 21.6%), \$50,000 to \$74,999 (N = 21, 41.2%), \$75,000 to \$99,999 (N = 5, 9.8%), \$100,000 or more (N = 5, 9.8%)

A pretest result revealed a significant difference between the two messages in the extent to which they considered the message as specific ($t(49) = -5.723, p < .01$). Participants perceived a specific message as more specific ($m = 2.59, SD = 1.12$) than a general message ($m = 4.46, SD = 1.22$). Therefore, two messages were selected to be employed in the main study.

Constructs

Independent Variables

For study 2, two independent variables were selected—message specific-ness of a company's CSR and consumer skepticism. Message specific-ness is defined as a company's CSR message, varying in terms of the graded notion of abstractness-concreteness (e.g., Feldman et al., 2006; Johnson & Fornell, 1987; Johnson & Kisielius, 1985; Macklin et al., 1985; Spreen & Schulz, 1966; Wiemer-Hastings & Xu 2005). This is operationalized for the extent to which a CSR message includes concepts that are more specific or less specific. To check the manipulation, two messages were measured by adopting a scale developed by MacKenzie

(1986); this scale measures message specific-ness on a 7-point bipolar scale for 5 items— detailed/sketchy, explicit/vague, concrete/abstract, vivid/dull, and specific/general (MacKenzie 1986; see Appendix F).

As done in study 1, consumer skepticism toward the company's CSR was measured by using 4 items on a 7-point semantic differential scale (Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013; see Appendix G).

Dependent Variables

To understand participants responses toward a company's CSR message, study 2 employed the same dependent variables from study 1—attitude toward the ad (Olney et al., 1991), attitude toward the company (Spears & Singh, 2004), socially responsible image (Berens et al., 2005; Brown & Dacin, 1997), intention to supportive the company (Coombs, 1999), product evaluation (Kim, 2014) and perceived uniqueness (Keller, 1993).

Procedure

Participants were first asked to participate in the study. After they agreed to the IRB terms, subject read a short description about Knip Foods, and were then randomly assigned to one of the two corporate advertisement different conditions, a less specific message condition (N = 87, 50.9%) and a more specific message condition (N = 84, 49.1%).

After they were exposed to the advertisement, subjects were asked to answer the manipulation check questions and to then indicate the extent to which they felt skeptical of the company's CSR. After having their skepticism measured, they were asked to answer questions about dependent variable measures. Finally, they were asked to answer demographic questions, then debriefed and thanked.

Analysis Method

Collected data was analyzed with the SPSS 25.0 statistical package. Frequency tests were used for data description. Also, reliability tests were used for the measurement development. For major analysis methods, the researcher employed a series of independent sample t-tests and Haye’s Process (Model 4). First, reliability tests were conducted to extract relevant items. From hypotheses 4 and 5, consumer response was analyzed by using a series of independent t-tests. To examine the mediating effects of skepticism (H6) on the effect of message specific-ness, the researcher performed a series of Hay’s Process (model 4).

RESULTS

Reliability Analysis

Internal consistency of major constructs used in the study was examined and the results are shown in Table 5.1. Cronbach’s alpha is given for consumer skepticism, attitude towards the ad, attitude towards the company, socially responsible image, supportive intention toward the company, and product evaluation. A series of reliability testing revealed that all measures were reliable (Nunnally, 1978).

Table 5.1. Reliability Analysis for Study 2

Measurements	# of items	Cronbach’s Alpha
Message Specific-ness	5	.91
Skepticism toward the company’s CSR	4	.87
Attitude toward the Advertisement	11	.94
Attitude toward the Company	13	.95
Socially Responsible Image	5	.94
Supportive Intention Toward the Company	5	.95
Product Evaluation	5	.95
Perceived Uniqueness	4	.97

Manipulation Checks

The result of an independent t-test revealed that two different CSR message types were successfully manipulated. The finding displays a significant difference between messages that

were more specific and less specific ($t(169) = 22.28, p < .001, d=3.42$). That is, on the manipulation check scale (MacKenzie, 1986), a less specific message ($M_{\text{General}} = 5.12$) scored significantly higher than a more specific message ($M_{\text{Specific}} = 2.11$). See Table 5.2.

Table 5.2. Manipulation check for Study 2: Message Specific-ness

	Message Conditions	N	Mean (SD)	t-value	df	p	Cohen's d
Message Specific-ness	<i>less specific</i>	87	5.12 (.92)	22.28	169	$p < .001$	3.42
	<i>more specific</i>	84	2.11 (.84)				

Hypothesis Testing

To examine the proposed hypotheses (See Table 5.3), this study performed a series of univariate hypothesis of independent t-tests. While the fixed variable was CSR message type, the dependent variables were skepticism, attitudes toward the message and company, socially responsible image, supportive intention toward the company, product evaluation, and perceived uniqueness.

Table 5.3. Proposed Hypotheses in Study 2

<i>Proposed Hypotheses in Study 2</i>
H4. A more specific message will generate less skepticism of a company's CSR than will a less specific message.
H5a. A more specific message will generate more positive attitudes toward the ad than will a less specific message.
H5b. A more specific message will generate a positive attitudes toward a company than will a less specific message.
H5c. A more specific message will generate a more socially responsible image than will a less specific message.
H5d. A more specific message will generate more supportive behavioral intention toward a company than will a less specific message.
H5e. A more specific message will generate higher perceived uniqueness of a company than will a less specific message.
H5f. A more specific message will generate more favorable evaluation of a company's product than will a less specific message.
H6. Consumer skepticism will mediate the effect of message specific-ness in H5.

The results revealed a significant difference between two message types (i.e., less specific versus more specific) on how participants responded to a company's CSR. First of all, findings suggest that participants showed significantly higher skepticism for a less specific message than a more specific message. A more specific message led to participants showing more favorable attitudes toward the ad and the company. Moreover, a more specific message led participants to consider a company as more socially responsible, possess a higher intention to support the company, a more favorable evaluation of the company's product, and perceived the company as more unique. Therefore, the proposed hypotheses from H4 to H5 were all supported. See Table 5.4 for more detail.

Table 5.4. Descriptive Statistic and T-values

	CC Fit	N	Mean (SD)	T-value	df	p	Cohen's d
SKP	<i>less specific</i>	87	4.19 (1.25)	10.65	169	<i>p</i> <.001	1.63
	<i>more specific</i>	84	2.17 (1.23)				
A _{Ad}	<i>less specific</i>	87	3.91 (1.10)	-10.28	169	<i>p</i> <.001	1.58
	<i>more specific</i>	84	5.65 (1.10)				
A _{com}	<i>less specific</i>	87	4.50 (1.02)	8.64	169	<i>p</i> <.001	1.32
	<i>more specific</i>	84	5.91 (1.11)				
SRI	<i>less specific</i>	87	4.74 (1.07)	-7.44	169	<i>p</i> <.001	1.14
	<i>more specific</i>	84	5.95 (1.06)				
SI	<i>less specific</i>	87	4.03 (1.39)	-6.47	169	<i>p</i> <.001	.99
	<i>more specific</i>	84	5.41(1.40)				
PE	<i>less specific</i>	87	4.69 (1.56)	5.18	169	<i>p</i> <.001	.68
	<i>more specific</i>	84	5.66 (1.31)				
PU	<i>less specific</i>	87	4.14 (1.44)	-6.14	169	<i>p</i> <.001	.94
	<i>more specific</i>	84	5.45 (1.35)				

In order to examine the role of consumer skepticism as a mediator on the impact of varying levels of message specific-ness on dependent variables, mediation analysis was performed by using model 4 in Hayes' PROCRSS macro. Each procedure inputted message specific-ness type as an independent variable, consumer skepticism as a mediator and dependent variables (i.e., attitudes toward the ad, company, socially responsible image, supportive intention

toward the company, product evaluation, perceived uniqueness). The mediation analysis used 5000 bootstrapping to examine the possible indirect effect of the level of message specific-ness on dependent variables. The results revealed that consumer skepticism mediated the effect of message specific-ness on attitude toward the advertisement ($R^2 = .58, F(2, 168) = 117.95, p < .001, b = -.51, SE = .06$), on attitude toward the company ($R^2 = .45, F(2, 168) = 69.52, p < .001, b = -.39, SE = .06$), socially responsible image ($R^2 = .32, F(2, 168) = 40.24, p < .001, b = -.28, SE = .06$), supportive intention toward the company ($R^2 = .25, F(2, 168) = 27.78, p < .001, b = -.28, SE = .08$), product evaluation ($R^2 = .21, F(2, 168) = 22.77, p < .001, b = -.30, SE = .07$), and perceived uniqueness ($R^2 = .22, F(2, 168) = 23.22, p < .001, b = -.23, SE = .09$). See Table 5.5-7.

Table 5.5. Mediation Analysis (Hayes's Process Model 4) Indirect Effects of Message specific-ness on Dependent Variables via Skepticism (Mediator) (5000 Bootstrap Samples)

	Dependent Variables											
	Ad Attitudes		Company Attitudes		Socially responsible image		Supportive Intention		Product Evaluation		Perceived Uniqueness	
	95% CI	Effect (SE)	95% CI	Effect (SE)	95% CI	Effect (SE)	95% CI	Effect (SE)	95% CI	Effect (SE)	95% CI	Effect (SE)
Message Specific-ness	.750/1.367	1.023 (.154)	.489/1.18	0.797 (.177)	.243/0.954	0.557 (.180)	.164/1.058	0.571 (.227)	.229/1.066	0.597 (.213)	0.547 (0.271)	0.051 1.133

Table 5.6. R-square for the proposed mediation models:

Model	R-square	MSE	F	df1	df2
MSG → SKP	.40	1.5367	113.50***	1	169
MSG → SKP → A _{Ad}	.58	.8271	117.95***	2	168
MSG → SKP → A _{Com}	.44	.9002	69.52***	2	168
MSG → SKP → SRI	.32	1.0284	40.24***	2	168
MSG → SKP → SI	.25	1.9585	27.78***	2	168
MSG → SKP → PE	.21	1.5145	22.77***	2	168
MSG → SKP → PU	.22	1.8783	23.22***	2	168

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Table 5.7. Path Coefficients

		Path Coefficients							
		to SKP		to A _{ad}		to A _{com}		to SRI	
		b	(se)	b	(se)	b	(se)	b	(se)
SKP				-0.51	(0.06)***	-.39	(0.06)***	-.28	(0.06)**
MSG	-2.02	(0.19)***		0.71	(0.18)***	0.61	(0.19)**	0.66	(0.20)**
				to SI		to PU		to PE	
		b	(se)	b	(se)	b	(se)	b	(se)
SKP				-0.28	(0.08)**	-0.23	(0.09)**	-0.30	(0.07)**
MSG				0.81	(0.27)**	0.85	(0.27)*	0.38	(0.23)

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

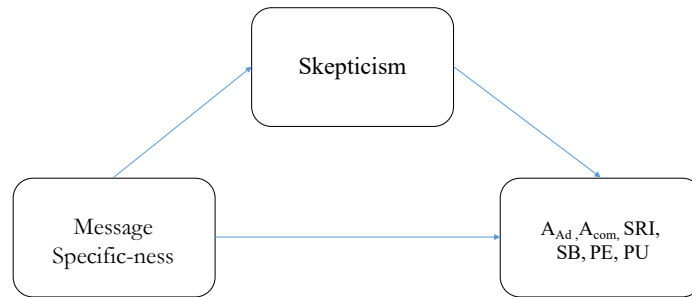


Figure 5.2. Skepticism mediated the effect of message specific-ness on attitude toward the ad & company, socially responsible image, intention to support the company, and perceived uniqueness

Specifically, the findings reveal that skepticism mediated the message specific-ness effect on attitudes toward the ad and company, socially responsible image, intention to support the company, product evaluation and perceived uniqueness. See Figure 5.2. Thus, H6 was supported.

DISCUSSION

Overall, in study 2, the results reveal that participants significantly differed between two message types in how they were skeptical of a company’s CSR. In other words, message specific-ness influenced the extent to which consumers became skeptical of a company’s CSR. Similar to the results from study 1, consumer skepticism of a company’s CSR influenced how they responded to the company and its CSR initiative.

First, the results indicate that subjects showed significantly less skepticism toward that company’s social responsibility initiative when the message was more specific. The findings

match previous research on how the degree of concreteness of information influences people to perceive a message as truthful and real (Hansen & Wanke, 2010; Schooler et al., 1986).

Researchers assert that information that is more specific and concrete is often rich in perceptual, semantic, and contextual detail, all of which become vivid in the memory, making people consider it to be more real (Akehurst et al., 1996; Darley & Smith, 1993; Johnson, 2006; Schooler et al., 1986). That is, the more vivid the details, people classify their memories as more likely to be real rather than imagined (Schooler et al., 1986). Hansen and Wanke (2010) also found that linguistic concreteness in messages influence how people perceive information as truthful. Similarly, this research found that the specific-ness of a message influence the extent to which consumers become skeptical of a company's CSR.

In addition, the results indicate significant differences between two types of CSR messages (i.e., less vs. more specific) on how participants responded to the company and its CSR initiative. Specifically, the results indicate that the more specific a message is, the more individuals display favorable responses toward the company, product, and its CSR. By the same token, the more general the message is, the less favorable responses toward a company, product and its CSR are generated. The findings align with the "concreteness effect" that numerous researchers have observed (e.g., Dickson, 1982; Fernandez & Rosen, 2000; Hansen & Wanke, 2010; MacKenzie, 1986; Percy, 1982). As noted above, past studies have defined the abstractness-concreteness of an ad copy as the extent to which an ad copy activates visual imagery in consumers' minds (e.g., Fernandez & Rosen, 2000; Krishnan et al., 2006; MacKenzie, 1986; Rossiter & Percy, 1978). Diverging from earlier studies, this study looked at another aspect of the abstractness-concreteness of an ad copy, that is, more versus less specific (e.g., Atkinson & Rosenthal, 2014; Feldman et al., 2006; Ganz & Grimes, 2018; Johnson &

Kisielius, 1985; Macklin et al., 1985; Spreen & Schulz, 1966). The results still show that the more specific a company's CSR message is, the more positive impact it has on subjects' responses toward a company and its CSR. Accordingly, the results suggest that the levels of message specific-ness influence how consumer respond to a company's social responsibility initiative.

Lastly, similar to study 1, the results indicate consumer skepticism as a significant mediator on the effect of message specific-ness on their responses toward a company and its CSR initiative. That is, the more specific a message is, the less skeptical are consumers, leading to more positive responses. The less specific the message is (more general), the more skeptical are consumers of the company's CSR, leading to less favorable responses. The results again reveal that messages that vary in their degree of specific-ness influence the extent to which consumers question the authenticity of a company's CSR. Specifically, the findings imply that the more general the message, the more skeptical the consumers are, leading to more negative responses. This aligns with what scholars argue, i.e., that more general messages are ambiguous and subjective (Robinson & Eilert, 2018), making it hard to interpret the company's CSR motives (Grau et al., 2007) that influence consumers' decisions and evaluations (Ganz & Grimes, 2018; Robinson & Eliert, 2018). Therefore, this research implies that consumer skepticism plays an important role in how consumers respond to a company and its CSR; it mediates the impact of message specific-ness to consumer response. The theoretical and practical implication are discussed further in Chapter 7.

Table 5.8. A Summary of Hypotheses Testing Results

Hypothesis	CC Fit	MSG	Prediction	Remark	Result
H4	Higher CC Fit	All Types	More < Less specific	“Concreteness effect” on SKP	Supported
H5a	Higher CC Fit	All Types	More > Less specific	“Concreteness effect” on A _{ad}	Supported
H5b	Higher CC Fit	All Types	More > Less specific	“Concreteness effect” on A _{com}	Supported
H5c	Higher CC Fit	All Types	More > Less specific	“Concreteness effect” on SRI	Supported
H5d	Higher CC Fit	All Types	More > Less specific	“Concreteness effect” on SI	Supported
H5e	Higher CC Fit	All Types	More > Less specific	“Concreteness effect” on PU	Supported
H5f	Higher CC Fit	All Types	More > Less specific	“Concreteness effect” on PE	Supported
H6	All Fit Types	All Types	MSG → SKP → DVs	SKP mediates the “Concreteness effect”	Supported

CHAPTER 6. STUDY 3

METHOD

Research Goal

As a follow-up study, the goal of study 3 is to examine the extent to which consumers respond to a company's CSR, as it varies by level of fit and message specific-ness. That is, the study further investigates the interaction effect of company-cause fit and message specific-ness on consumer skepticism, and the mediating role of consumer skepticism in terms of how much the interplay of company-cause fit and message specific-ness affects consumers' responses to a company's CSR. In study 3, there are three independent variables (i.e., types of company-cause fit, message specific-ness, and consumer skepticism toward a company's CSR) and six dependent variables (i.e., attitudes toward the ad, attitudes toward the company, socially responsible image, supportive behavioral intention toward a company, product evaluation, and perceived uniqueness).

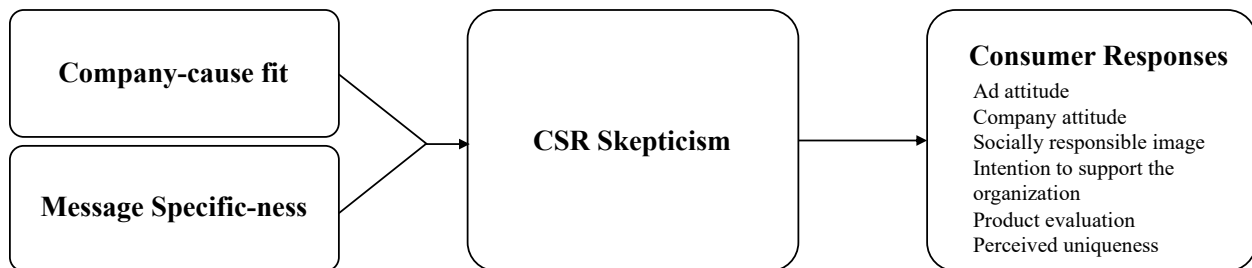


Figure 6.1. CSR skepticism mediates the interaction effect of Company-cause fit and message specific-ness on consumer response

Study Design

To examine the proposed hypothesis, a 2 (fit: lower vs. higher CC fit) x 2 (message specific-ness: more vs. less specific) x 2 (consumer skepticism: high vs. low) between-subject experimental design was conducted. Perceived company-cause fit, and message specific-ness were manipulated, and consumer skepticism was measured. Accordingly, participants were

assigned to one of four conditions—a high company-cause fit and a more specific message, a high company-cause fit and a less specific message, a low company-cause fit and a less specific message, and a low company-cause fit and a more specific message condition.

Sample Characteristics

Using a Qualtrics online panel, the researcher gathered a total of 291 participants. Of these, 45.0% male (N = 131); 52.9% were female (N = 154), 1.4 % were other (N = 4), and .7% preferred not to say (N = 2). The average age of the participants was 39.38 (SD = 13.98, range = 18-76). In terms of the education level of the sample, 30.6% had some college (N = 89), 26.5% had a high school/GED diploma (N = 77), 19.9% had a four-year college degree (N = 58), 13.1% had a two-year college degree (N = 38), 6.9% had a master's degree (N = 20), 1.7% had less than high school (N = 5), 1% held a doctoral degree (N = 3), and .3% had a professional degree (N = 1).

The ethnic composition of the sample was as follows: the majority of participants were White (N = 190, 65.3%) followed by African American (N = 44, 15.1%), Hispanic or Latino origin (N = 24, 8.2%), Asian (N = 22, 7.6%), Other (N = 5, 1.7%), Native American or Alaskan Native (N = 4, 1.4%), Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (N = 1, .3%), and .3% preferred not to say (N = 1). Lastly, subjects reported their income as follows: \$25,000 to \$49,999 (N = 103, 30.8%), less than \$25,000 (N = 89, 26.6%), \$50,000 to \$74,999 (N = 58, 17.4%), \$100,000 or more (N = 38, 11.4%), \$75,000 to \$99,999 (N = 35, 10.5%), and preferring not to say (N = 11, 3.3%).

Stimuli Development

The study used the same fictitious company, Knip Foods, to examine the interaction effect of company-cause fit and message specific-ness of a company's CSR messages on

skepticism and dependent variables. As a follow-up study, four different messages were developed according to previous tests and pretested to make sure that specific-ness was manipulated appropriately.

Based on study 1 and 2, the researcher developed four different messages that manipulated the level of company-cause fit and specific-ness of message: a low company-cause fit and general message, a low company-cause fit and specific message, a high company-cause fit and general message, and a high company-cause fit and specific message.

Across the different conditions, the length, meaning, font size, background picture, and location of the text were kept the same; only the company-cause fit, and message specific-ness were manipulated. The total number of words used for four messages were almost equal; the respective numbers were as follows: a low company-cause fit and a less specific message condition (36), a low company-cause fit and more specific message (40), a high company-cause fit and a less specific message (39), and a high company-cause fit and a more specific message (41). Across all four of these conditions, the meanings stayed the same—Knip foods was supporting a societal cause—only the topic changed.

In the headline, for the low CC fit condition, a less specific message indicated the company supported the arts; it said, “Knip Foods regularly donates large funds to support the arts in America.” The more specific message provided numbers indicating Knip Foods’ contribution, “Knip Foods annually donates \$ 2 million to support the arts in America.”

In the body text, for the low CC fit condition, a general message used concepts that included other concepts, such as regularly gave (rather than specifically indicating a timeline) and described abstract terms, such as achieving their goal: “At Knip Foods, we are regularly giving our resources to non-profit organizations supporting the arts. We have helped many

emerging artists grow and achieve their goal.” On the other hand, the specific message employed more specific concepts that were included in other concepts, such as annually giving and laying out a detailed timeline of their donations. In addition, the message included a specific number with which they were helping to develop an exact skill, such as art skills and acquiring internships: “At Knip Foods, we are annually donating money and employee volunteering to non-profit organizations supporting the arts. We have helped 170 emerging artists develop art skills and acquire internships.”

Pretest. A Company-Cause Fit & Message Specific-ness

A pretest was carried out to select suitable messages for the study 3. In this study, participants were asked to rate the extent to which they considered the message as being specific. To evaluate the extent to which subjects considered message as specific, the researcher employed the same scale adopted in study 2 (MacKenzie 1986; Cronbach alpha = .95; see Appendix F).

A total of 32 subjects were collected through mTurk. Of these 67.7% were Male (N = 21) and 32.3% Female (N = 10). The average age was 35.76 ($SD = 10.21$) and the range was between 23 and 56. The ethnic composition of the sample was as follows: White (N = 22, 71.1%) followed by Asian (N = 5, 16.1%), Native American or Alaskan Native (N = 2, 6.5%), Hispanic or Latino origin (N = 1, 3.2 %), and other N = 1, 3.2 %). Lastly, subjects reported their income as follows: \$25,000 to \$49,999 (N = 13, 41.9%), followed by \$50,000 to \$74,999 (N = 7, 22.6%), less than \$25,000 (N = 6, 19.4%), \$100,000 or more (N = 3, 9.7%), and \$75,000 to \$99,999 (N = 2, 6.5%). for each demographic variable, there were 2 missing data, and all the missing data was replaced by the median of the variable.

To examine how messages were appropriately manipulated in their spectrum of generality-specificity, a paired-sample t-test was performed. The result revealed a significant

difference between the two messages (i.e., more specific versus less specific) in the extent to which they considered the message as being specific ($t(30) = 4.36, p < .01$). Participants perceived a specific message as more specific ($M = 2.90, SD = 1.27$) than a less specific message ($M = 4.08, SD = 1.21$). Therefore, two messages were selected to be employed in the main study. See Table 6.1 for more detail.

Table 6.1. Descriptive statistics for Message Specific-ness

	MSG Condition	N	Mean (SD)	<i>t</i> -value	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Message Specific-ness	<i>Less specific</i>	31	4.08 (1.21)	4.36	30	$p < .001$
	<i>More specific</i>	31	2.90 (1.27)			

To ensure that condition of different fit did not influence the manipulation of message specific-ness, a one-way ANOVA was performed. The results indicated that the general messages between two different CC fit conditions were not significantly different in their generality. Also, specific messages between the two different CC fit conditions did not vary significantly in its specificity. Therefore, those four messages were selected to carry out study 3. See Table 6.2 for detailed descriptive statistics results.

Table 6.2. Descriptive statistics for Message Specific-ness and CC fit

	MSG Condition	N	Mean (SD)	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Less specific</i>	Low CC fit	16	3.86 (1.35)	1.10	29	$p > .1$
	High CC fit	15	4.32 (1.04)			
<i>More specific</i>	Low CC fit	16	2.94 (0.85)	1.40	29	$p > .1$
	High CC fit	15	2.86 (1.56)			

Constructs

Independent Variables

In this study, there were three independent variables—the level of company-cause fit, message specific-ness, and consumer skepticism. The study employed the same manipulation check scales used in studies 1 and 2 for the level of perceived company-cause fit (Speed & Thomson 2000; see Appendix E) and message specific-ness (MacKenzie 1986; see Appendix F). In addition, as in previous studies, consumer skepticism was measured using a 7-point semantic differential scale adopted by Skarmeas and Leonidou (2013; see Appendix G).

Dependent Variables

To understand participant responses toward a company's CSR message, this study employed the same dependent variables from studies 1 and 2—attitude toward the ad (MacKenzie et al., 1986), attitude toward the company (Spears & Singh, 2004), socially responsible image (Berens et al. 2005; Brown & Dacin, 1997), intention to support the company (Coombs, 1999), product evaluation (Kim 2014), and perceived uniqueness (Keller, 2003).

Procedure

Participants were first asked to participate in the study. After they agreed to the IRB terms, subject read a short description about Knip Foods, were then randomly assigned to one of the four corporate advertisement conditions—a high company-cause fit with a more specific message condition, a high company-cause fit with a less specific message condition, a low company-cause fit with a less specific message, and a low company-cause fit with a specific message. A cross-tabulation analysis indicates that there is no significant difference among four cells in terms of the numbers assigned (*Chi-square value = 1.83, p > .5*). For more detail, see Table 6.3.

After participants observed the advertisement, they were asked to answer manipulation check questions, then measured their skepticism toward a company's CSR and dependent variable measures. After all is finished, they were asked to answer demographic questions, then debriefed and thanked.

Table 6.3. Random assignment for each cell: Cross-Tabulation analysis

CC Fit X MSG		<i>Less specific</i>	<i>More specific</i>	Total
<i>Lower CC fit</i>	count	76	64	140
	% of total	26.1%	22.0%	48.1%
<i>Higher CC fit</i>	count	70	81	151
	% of total	24.1%	27.8%	51.9%
Total	count	146	145	291
	% of total	50.2%	49.8%	100.0%

Analysis Method

Collected data was analyzed with the SPSS 25.0 statistical package. For data description, the researcher used frequency tests. Also, reliability tests were used for the measurement development. For major analysis methods, the researcher employed a series of analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Haye's Process (Model 8). First of all, reliability tests were conducted to extract relevant items. From Hypotheses 7 and 8, consumer response was analyzed using a series of ANOVA and planned contrasts. Furthermore, a series of Hay's Process (model 8) was performed to examine the mediating effects of skepticism on the interaction effect of company-cause fit and message specific-ness (H9).

RESULTS

Reliability Analysis

Internal consistency of major constructs used in the study were examined and the results are shown in Table 6.4. Cronbach's alpha are provided for consumer skepticism, attitude towards

the ad, attitude towards the company, socially responsible image, supportive intention toward the company, and product evaluation. A series of reliability testing revealed that all measures were reliable (Nunnally, 1978).

Table 6.4. Reliability Analysis for Study 3

Measurements	# of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Company-Cause Fit	5	.94
Message Specific-ness	5	.89
Skepticism toward the company's CSR	4	.84
Attitude toward the Advertisement	11	.94
Attitude toward the Company	13	.96
Socially Responsible Image	5	.94
Supportive Intention Toward the Company	5	.93
Product Evaluation	5	.94
Perceived Uniqueness	4	.95

Manipulation Checks

A series of independent t-test was performed to check whether all conditions were appropriately manipulated. The results indicated there was a significant difference between the two message conditions—specific vs. general—in how participants considered the message as specific. That is, subjects rated a specific message as more detailed and concrete than a general message. See Table 6.5 and 6.6 for more detail.

Table 6.5. Manipulation Check for Message Specific-ness

	MSG Condition	N	Mean (SD)	t-value	df	p	Cohen's d
Message Specific-ness	<i>less specific</i>	166	3.56 (1.55)	6.53	320.70 ^a	p<.001	.71
	<i>more specific</i>	168	2.54 (1.29)				

^a= Levene's test indicated unequal variances (F =7.57, p = .006), so degrees of freedom were adjusted from 332 to 320.70.

Moreover, the results indicated a significant difference between the two CC fit conditions—high CC fit vs. low CC fit. That is, subjects rated a high CC fit condition as a company and its supporting cause as more congruent than a low CC condition.

Table 6.6. Descriptive Statistics for the Message Specific-ness Manipulation Check Scale

	<i>Lower CC fit</i>		F_a	<i>Higher CC fit</i>		F_a
	<i>Less specific</i>	<i>More specific</i>		<i>Less specific</i>	<i>More specific</i>	
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)		Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	
MC	3.58	3.12	4.30*	3.54	2.1	47.13** *
^M	(1.65)	(1.3)		(1.44)	(1.11)	

a: $df=1, 330$

Furthermore, since the contents of the messages between the two different CC fit conditions were slightly different due to manipulating CC fit, an analysis of variance analysis (ANOVA) was conducted to confirm whether the message specific-ness well operated across two CC fit conditions. The results indicated that in the lower CC fit condition, participants showed a significant difference between the less specific versus more specific message in how they responded to the manipulation scale (MacKenzie, 1986). Similarly, in the higher CC fit condition, participants responded significantly differently between the less specific versus more specific message. Therefore, message specific-ness was appropriately manipulated across all conditions. See Table 6.7 and 6.8 for more detail.

Table 6.7. Manipulation Check for CC Fit

	CC Fit Condition	N	Mean	t-value	df	p
MC _F	<i>Lower CC fit</i>	157	4.22 (1.61)	-8.53	285.52 ^a	$p < .001$
	<i>Higher CC fit</i>	177	5.56 (1.20)			

a= Levene's test indicated unequal variances ($F=14.74, p = .000$), so degrees of freedom were adjusted from 332 to 285.52.

Table 6.8. Descriptive Statistics for the CC Fit Manipulation Check Scale

	<i>Less specific</i>		F_a	<i>More specific</i>		F_a
	<i>Lower CC fit</i>	<i>Higher CC fit</i>		<i>Lower CC fit</i>	<i>Higher CC fit</i>	
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)		Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	
MC _F	4.58 (1.45)	5.03 (1.27)	4.82*	3.81 (1.45)	6.02 (.92)	110.81***

a: df=1, 330

Hypotheses Testing

To examine the proposed hypotheses (See Table 5.9), a series of ANOVA was performed. While the fixed variable were CC fit and CSR message types, the dependent variables were skepticism, attitudes toward the message and company, socially responsible image, supportive intention toward the company, product evaluation and perceived uniqueness.

Table 6.9. Proposed Hypotheses in Study 3

<i>Proposed Hypotheses in Study 3</i>
H7. In the low-fit condition, participants will be less skeptical of a less specific message than a more specific message.
H8a. In the low-fit condition, participants will show a more favorable attitudes toward the ad for a less specific message than a more specific message.
H8b. In the low-fit condition, participants a more favorable attitudes toward the company for a less specific message than a more specific message.
H8c. In the low-fit condition, participants will show a more socially responsible image for a less specific message than a more specific message.
H8d. In the low-fit condition, participants will show greater intention to support the company for a less specific message than a more specific message.
H8e. In the low-fit condition, participants will perceive a company to be more unique for a less specific message than a more specific message.
H8f. In the low-fit condition, a less specific message will elicit more positive product evaluation for a less specific message than a more specific message.
H9: Skepticism will mediate the interaction of company-cause fit and message specific-ness on consumer response.

First, the result showed significant main effects of CC fit across all dependent variables. The main effect of message specific-ness was significant only for attitudes toward the company, socially responsible image, and product evaluation. That is, participants assigned to the high CC

condition showed more positive response than those assigned to the low CC condition.

Compared to a less specific message, a more specific one generated more positive attitudes toward the company, socially responsible image, and product evaluation than.

The findings also revealed significant interaction effects of CC fit and message specific-ness on consumer skepticism toward the company's CSR ($F(1, 330) = 35.31, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .10$) attitudes toward the advertisement ($F(1, 330) = 24.12, p < .01, \eta^2 = .07$), attitudes toward the company ($F(1, 330) = 30.48, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .09$), socially responsible image ($F(1, 330) = 29.43, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .08$), intention to support the company ($F(1, 330) = 23.45, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .07$), product evaluation ($F(1, 330) = 29.97, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .08$), and perceived uniqueness ($F(1, 330) = 21.35, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .06$). See Table 6.10-11 for detail.

To examine the interaction in more detail, a series of planned contrast was performed. In the high CC fit condition, similar to the results from study 2, a more specific message yielded significant differences from a less specific message regarding consumer skepticism, attitude toward the ad and company, socially responsible image, intention to support the organization, product evaluation, and perceived uniqueness of a company. Specifically, when given a more specific message participants showed less skepticism toward a company's CSR. Subjects displayed more favorable attitudes toward the ad and the company, considered the company as more socially responsible, had higher intention to support the organization, evaluated the company's product more highly, and perceived the company as more unique for a more specific message than a less specific message. See Table 6.11 for more detail.

In contrast, in the low CC fit condition, when given a general message, participants showed less skepticism toward the company's CSR. Subjects displayed more favorable attitudes toward the ad and the company, considered the company more socially responsible, had higher

intention to support the organization, evaluated the company's product more highly, and perceived the company as more unique for a less specific message than a more specific message. Thus, H7 and H8 were supported. See Table 6.11 for more detail.

In order to examine the role of consumer skepticism as a mediator on the interaction effect of varying levels of CC fit and message specific-ness on dependent variables, mediation analysis was performed by using model 8 in Hayes' PROCRSS macro. Each procedure inputted CC fit type as an independent variable, consumer skepticism as a mediator and dependent variables (i.e., attitudes toward the ad, company, socially responsible image, supportive intention toward the company, product evaluation, perceived uniqueness). The mediation analysis used 5000 bootstrapping to examine the possible indirect effect of the interplay of CC fit and message specific-ness on dependent variables. The results revealed that consumer skepticism mediated the interaction effect of CC fit and message specific-ness on attitude toward the message ($R^2 = .48$, $F(4, 329) = 77.16$, $p < .001$, $b = .31$, $SE = .23$), on attitude toward the company ($R^2 = .51$, $F(4, 329) = 86.99$, $p < .001$, $b = .40$, $SE = .21$), socially responsible image ($R^2 = .48$, $F(4, 329) = 76.30$, $p < .001$, $b = .48$, $SE = .23$), supportive intention toward the company ($R^2 = .30$, $F(4, 329) = 35.18$, $p < .001$, $b = .66$, $SE = .30$), product evaluation ($R^2 = .37$, $F(4, 329) = 47.34$, $p < .001$, $b = .62$, $SE = .23$) and perceived uniqueness ($R^2 = .29$, $F(4, 329) = 34.40$, $p < .001$, $b = .54$, $SE = .28$). See Table 6.12-6.14 for more detail.

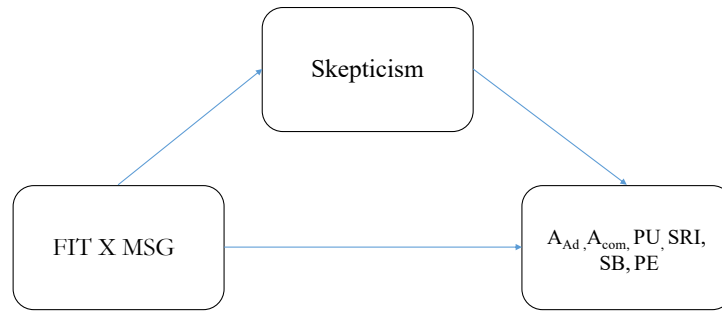


Figure 6.2. Consumer skepticism mediated the interaction effect of company-cause fit and message specific-ness on socially responsible image, intention to support a company, and product evaluation

Specifically, skepticism partially mediated the extent to which message specific-ness influenced attitudes toward the ad and company, socially responsible image, intention to support the company, product evaluation, and perceived uniqueness. See Figure 6.2. Thus, H9 was supported.

Table 6.10. Effects of CC Fit and Message Specific-ness on Consumer responses to a company's CSR

	Consumer Skepticism ^b		Attitude Ad ^b		Attitude Company ^b		Socially Responsible Image ^b		Intention to Support the Company ^b		Product Evaluation ^b		Perceived Uniqueness ^b	
	MS ^a	F	MS ^a	F	MS ^a	F	MS ^a	F	MS ^a	F	MS ^a	F	MS ^a	F
CC Fit	11.43	5.99*	17.36	9.93**	5.60	3.90*	33.92	21.12***	27.71	13.19***	15.48	11.05**	8.31	4.24*
MSG	6.34	3.32	6.67	3.82	7.14	4.97*	8.40	5.23*	2.36	1.12	7.13	5.08*	5.15	2.63
CC Fit X MSG	67.39	35.31***	42.15	24.12***	43.77	30.48***	47.28	29.43***	49.27	23.45***	42.00	29.97***	41.83	21.35***

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$; a = Mean Square; b = $df = 1, 330$

Table 6.11. Descriptive Statistics and Planned Contrast Analysis Result

Dependent Variables	Low CC Fit				High CC Fit			
	Less specific		More specific		Less specific		More specific	
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	F	η_p^2	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	F	η_p^2
A _{ad}	4.84 (0.14)	4.59 (0.15)	4.13**	0.01	4.41 (0.16)	5.58 (0.14)	25.06***	0.07
A _{com}	5.38 (0.13)	4.91 (0.13)	5.11*	0.02	4.94 (0.14)	5.93 (0.12)	31.95***	0.09
SRI	5.01 (0.14)	4.89 (0.14)	4.65*	0.01	4.57 (0.15)	5.97 (0.13)	31.62***	0.09
SI	4.49 (0.16)	4.30 (0.16)	6.75*	0.02	3.89 (0.17)	5.24 (0.15)	18.53***	0.05
PE	5.08 (0.13)	4.66 (0.14)	4.89*	0.02	4.80 (0.13)	5.80 (0.12)	31.77***	0.09
PU	4.83 (0.15)	4.37 (0.17)	3.29	0.01	4.43 (0.16)	5.39 (0.14)	22.22***	0.06

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Table 6.12. Indirect Effects of Message specific-ness on Dependent Variables via Skepticism (Mediator) (5000 Bootstrap Samples)

	Dependent Variables											
	A _{Ad}		A _{com}		SRI		SI		PE		PU	
	95% CI	Effect (SE)	95% CI	Effect (SE)	95% CI	Effect (SE)	95% CI	Effect (SE)	95% CI	Effect (SE)	95% CI	Effect (SE)
Less Specific	-.594 -.052	-.330 (.137)	-.569/ -.055	-.310 (.131)	-.562/ -.047	-.304 (.131)	-.502/ -.046	-.259 (.116)	-.497/ -.045	-.259 (.114)	-.447/ -.036	-.237 (.105)
More Specific	.541/ 1.07	.792 (.138)	.501/ .990	.744 (.124)	.489/ .993	.729 (.128)	.405/ .890	.622 (.124)	.406/ .884	.621 (.123)	.373/ .795	.569 (.108)

Table 6.13. R-square for the proposed mediation models:

Model	R-square	MSE	F	df1	df2
CC Fit X MSG → SKP	.12	1.91	15.64***	3	330
CC Fit X MSG → SKP → A _{Ad}	.48	1.01	77.16***	4	329
CC Fit X MSG → SKP → A _{com}	.51	.79	86.99***	4	329
CC Fit X MSG → SKP → SRI	.48	.99	76.31***	4	329
CC Fit X MSG → SKP → SI	.30	1.65	35.18***	4	329
CC Fit X MSG → SKP → PE	.37	1.03	47.34***	4	329
CC Fit X MSG → SKP → PU	.29	1.51	34.40***	4	329

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Table 6.14. Path Coefficients

Path Coefficients								
	to SKP		to A _{ad}		to A _{com}		to SRI	
	<i>b</i>	(se)	<i>b</i>	(se)	<i>b</i>	(se)	<i>b</i>	(se)
SKP			-0.62	(0.40)***	-0.58	(0.35)***	-0.57	(0.40)***
CC Fit	-0.38	(0.15)*	0.23	(0.11)*	0.05	(0.10)	0.43	(0.11)**
MSG	-0.33	(0.15)*	0.12	(0.11)	0.14	(0.10)	0.17	(0.11)
FIT X MSG	-1.81	(0.30)***	0.31	(0.23)	0.40	(.21)	0.48	(0.23)*
			to SI		to PU		to PE	
			<i>b</i>	(se)	<i>b</i>	(se)	<i>b</i>	(se)
SKP			-0.49	(0.05)***	-0.49	(0.05)***	-0.45	(0.04)***
CC Fit			0.40	(0.14)*	0.14	(0.14)	0.27	(0.11)*
MSG			0.05	(0.14)	0.13	(0.14)	0.19	(0.11)
FITX MSG			0.66	(0.30)*	0.54	(0.28)	0.62	(.23)**

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

DISCUSSION

Overall, the findings in study 3 revealed a significant interplay between the levels of company-cause (CC) fit and message specific-ness on how consumers respond to a company's CSR, and the mediating role of skepticism on the effect.

First, the result showed a significant interaction effect of message specific-ness and CC fit on consumer skepticism. When the CC fit was high, consumers felt less skeptical of a company's CSR for a more specific message than a less specific message. Similar to "the concreteness effect," participants responded to messages that were more specific (Feldman et al., 2006; Johnson & Fornell, 1987; Johnson & Kisielius, 1985; Macklin et al., 1985; Spreen & Schulz, 1966; Wiemer-Hastings & Xu, 2005) when they perceived the company and its social initiative as being congruent (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Menon & Kahn, 2003; Pracejus & Olsen, 2004; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006; Speed & Thompson, 2000). As

noted above, a message that is more specific consists of more concrete and vivid words that create more realism in an observer considering their claim (Hansen & Wanke, 2010; MacKenzie, 1986; Schooler et al., 1986). The findings imply that the effect of concreteness due to the message specific-ness was facilitated when consumers perceived the company and its supporting cause as a match.

In contrast, when a CC fit was lower, participants showed significantly higher levels of skepticism of a company's CSR for a more specific message than for a less specific message. This implies that the levels of CC fit moderated the extent to which consumers processed CSR messages. Specifically, consumers experience more cognitive elaboration when a CC fit is low (Menon & Kahn, 2003; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006) due to the difficulty of integrating the unexpected information into their existing knowledge structure (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006). Thus, it is assumed that while consumers' cognitive energy is attended to elaborating the CC fit (Marois & Ivanoff, 2005), it may influence how they process messages at a varying levels of specific-ness.

Furthermore, researchers have suggested that psychological distance judgements are influenced by the metacognitive experience of cognitive fluency (i.e., perceived ease of processing information). Alter and Oppenheimer (2008) suggested that people are more likely to interpret the world abstractly when they experience cognitive disfluency, or to have difficulty processing stimuli in the environment. Likewise, while a general consumer, with neither knowledge nor ability (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987), process two inconsistent pieces of information (e.g., a low company-cause fit) may construe a company's CSR message more abstractly (Alter & Oppenheimer, 2008; Liberman et al., 2007; Trope & Liberman, 2003). Accordingly, the mind-set of consumers is likely to influence how they consume messages.

Many researchers have observed that the degree of commensurability of information abstractness influences information processing (Aaker et al. 2001; Lee et al., 2010; Lee & Higgins 2009; Spaassova & Lee, 2013). In other words, persuasion increases when a message framing matches the psychological state of a person (Wagner et al., 2009; Ziamou & Ratneshwar, 2003). When the message exhibits a similar degree of abstraction of the persons psychological state, the information presented initially becomes more mentally accessible (Ziamou & Ratneshwar, 2003) and gives rise to a realization (Albarracin et al., 2004). Therefore, the likelihood of a change in attitude is increased by the perceived compatibility of the mental state and the message (Johar et al., 2005).

Another possible explanation of this moderation is as follows. While consumers engage in more elaboration to understand a relationship, the perception of the incongruity of the two concepts (i.e., the company and its supporting cause) is likely to be amplified by a more specific message, one that evokes more imagery (MacKenzie, 1986). On the other hand, messages that are more general may lead consumers to focus more on abstract concepts, such as a broader goal (e.g., well-being of the society) or a higher goal (Lee & Aaker, 2004; Liberman et al., 2002) and less on details that could ease their difficulty in processing inconsistent information (Liberman et al., 2002; Torelli et al., 2009). Similarly, a more general message has the flexibility to include different concepts (Rosch, 1979) that help people integrate the new knowledge into their existing structure (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006). Accordingly, this research assumes that the interaction of the levels of CC fit and message specific-ness impacts how consumers respond to a company's CSR.

Lastly, the results reveal consumer skepticism as a significant mediator on the interaction effect on how consumers respond to a company and its CSR initiative. Similar to studies 1 and 2,

when skepticism increased, participants responded more negatively toward the company and its CSR. The results imply that whenever skepticism is available to consumers, they are more likely to respond negatively to a company and its CSR. Skepticism appeared to closely influence consumers in forming attitudes, intentions, and evaluations. Researchers postulate that skepticism discounts the effect of persuasion (Obermiller & Spandenberg, 2005) and negatively influences consumer responses to a company's CSR (Skaremeas & Leonidou, 2013). Theoretical and practical implications of the study are discussed in Chapter 7.

Table 6.15. A Summary of Hypotheses Testing Results

Hypothesis	CC Fit	MSG	Prediction	Remark	Result
H7	Lower CC Fit	All Types	More > Less specific	CC fit & Concreteness effect on SKP	Supported
H8a	Lower CC Fit	All Types	More < Less specific	CC fit & Concreteness effect on A _{ad}	Supported
H8b	Lower CC Fit	All Types	More < Less specific	CC fit & Concreteness effect on A _{com}	Supported
H8c	Lower CC Fit	All Types	More < Less specific	CC fit & Concreteness effect on SRI	Supported
H8d	Lower CC Fit	All Types	More < Less specific	CC fit & Concreteness effect on SI	Supported
H8e	Lower CC Fit	All Types	More < Less specific	CC fit & Concreteness effect on PU	Supported
H8f	Lower CC Fit	All Types	More < Less specific	CC fit & Concreteness effect on PE	Supported
H9	Lower CC Fit	Less specific	CC*MSG → SKP → DVs	SKP mediates the effect of CC fit & MSG specific-ness	Supported

CHAPTER 7. IMPLICATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

SUMMARY

Overall, this dissertation has examined key theoretical constructs in corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication. These constructs are the level of company-cause fit, message specific-ness, and consumer skepticism. In study 1, the results from online experiments suggest that participants showed significant difference between varying levels of company-cause (CC) fit. In study 2, the findings suggest significant differences in how subjects responded to two message types that vary in the levels of message specific-ness. In study 3, the findings reveal a significant interaction effect on consumer skepticism caused by the level of CC fit and message specific-ness. Lastly, the outcomes illustrate that consumer skepticism of a company's CSR mediates the effect of CC fit, message specific-ness, and their interaction on consumer response to a company and its social initiatives.

First, the results in study 1 reveal that a company-cause fit influences the extent to which consumers become skeptical of a company's CSR. When it came to the two types of company-cause fit, participants showed a significant difference in how skeptical they were of a company's CSR. They were less skeptical of a company's CSR practice if it had a good CC fit condition. The level of CC fit also influenced consumer attitude toward the ad and company, perception of a socially responsible image, intention to support the organization, perception of uniqueness, and evaluation of product. The more that consumers perceived a company to match well its supporting cause, the more positively they responded to the company and its CSR. Finally, the findings suggest that consumer skepticism of a company's CSR mediates the impact of company-cause fit on their responses.

In study 2, the results indicate that the level of message specific-ness influenced consumer skepticism and consumer response toward a company and its CSR. When a message was less specific, consumers were more skeptical of the company's CSR effort. When a message was more specific, consumers were more skeptical of the company's CSR effort. Participants responded more positively to a more specific message. Thus, message specific-ness appeared to influence how consumers responded to a company and its CSR. Finally, consumer skepticism mediated how message specific-ness influenced their responses.

In study 3, the findings depict a significant interaction between the level of CC fit and message specific-ness. The message specific-ness effect appeared, as it did in study 2, in the high CC condition. In the low CC fit condition, however, consumers responses differed from previous findings. Consumers responded more positively to a less specific message. Accordingly, the level of CC fit influenced the extent to which consumers responded to a message that varied in its level of specific-ness. The results offer fresh insight into the cognitive processing literature and provide practical guidelines in crafting CSR messages. Lastly, the results again show that the interaction between level of CC fit and message specific-ness on consumer response is mediated by consumer skepticism of a company's CSR.

Therefore, this research contributes to advancing the field of CSR by re-examining the effect of CC fit, theorizing about and exploring the message specific-ness effect, as well as explicating the relationship between CC fit and message specific-ness from the perspective of cognitive processing. Lastly, the study clarifies how being skeptical of a company's CSR mediates the effect of CSR and a company's communication about it. The implications are discussed further in the following section.

IMPLICATIONS

There are several practical implications for researchers and practitioners to consider in understanding how consumers respond to a company's CSR.

A company-cause fit

First of all, the findings in this research imply that the level of company-cause fit in CSR is a key factor in determining how consumers respond to a company's socially responsible initiatives. Although several studies have indicated no main effect of CC fit (see Barone et al., 2007; Menon & Khan, 2003; Nan & Heo, 2007), the current research suggested that the level of company-cause fit influenced how consumers respond to a company's CSR (e.g., Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Ellen et al., 2000; Pracejus & Olsen, 2004; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006). The associative network theory (Anderson, 1983) postulates that a good fit between prior expectations of a firm and a given social initiative can be easily integrated into the consumers' existing cognitive structure. This strengthens the association between the firm and the social initiative, while guiding audiences to form favorable perceptions of the firm (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Simonin & Ruth, 1998; Speed & Thompson, 2000). Moreover, schema theory posits that a cognitive structure—the organization of knowledge—influences information processing (S. E. Taylor, Crocker, & D'Agostino, 1978) and that incongruence, or a mismatch, of information yields a greater number of inferences. Consequently, incongruence increases cognitive elaboration (Hastie, 1984). According to persuasion literature, the more that consumers engage in elaboration, the more likely it is that they will not be easily persuaded (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Therefore, the findings imply that consumers generally use a company-cause fit to evaluate a company and its CSR (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Das et al. 2014; Du et al. 2010; Ellen et al., 2000; Pracejus & Olsen, 2004).

For more practical implications, it is critical that, first, practitioners trying to select an appropriate social cause to support understand their business, product, service, image, customers, and mission. It is important that practitioners understand well the expectations of their stakeholders, such as consumers, in regard to engaging in social responsibility initiatives. Such an understanding helps stakeholders build perceived congruency between an organization and its supporting cause. This congruency can often facilitate their transferring the positive affect of supporting the societal cause to one of the company's attributes (Drumwright, 1996; Shimp, 1981).

Moreover, it is important that brand/companies select an appropriate social cause, especially in times of corporate crisis, or when there is heavy media coverage of corporate scandals or misconduct in social responsibility. This is because CC fit affects how consumers attribute a company's true motivation, especially when the motivation is made salient to the respondents (Lee & Rim, 2016; Szyman et al., 2004; Vanhamme & Grobben, 2009; Yoon et al., 2006). For example, consumers may be vigilant about the marketing effort of a firm that has recently experienced negative publicity. They may become quickly skeptical of a firm's CSR efforts (Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006). The available information increases the chance for consumers to access skepticism toward a company's CSR and discount the company's CSR and its messages (Skaremeas & Leonidou, 2013).

Furthermore, to overcome the negative impact of low CC fit, practitioners can use strategic communication to build consistency between the company and its supporting cause (Bridges et al., 2000; Du et al. 2010; Lim et al., 2015; Simmons & Becker-Olsen 2006). Research suggests that consistency in communication helps build clarity (Erdem & Swait, 1998; Keller, 1993; Park et al., 1986) and increases credibility regarding the company's CSR

commitment (Du et al. 2010; Pomeroy & Johnson, 2009). Accordingly, a fit between a firm's specific association and a cause can be created through consistent communication and reinforce a firm's positioning (Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006).

Also, to build consistency and high level of CC fit, marketers and managers should use a more holistic approach to communicate CSR. A company should make sure that what they are communicating matches the impact they are making on society. Practitioners can use communication to reveal their CSR at various levels of the organization, such as ideological (i.e., what a company believes it should be doing in CSR), operational (i.e., what a company actually employ in CSR) , and societal aspect (i.e., how a company responds to societal demands) (Lim et al., 2015; Zenisek, 1979), rather than implementing a CSR theme as a one-time social campaign.

According to this model, the degree of congruence between the ideological and the operational aspects can lead to a "moral crisis." Thus, it is important that practitioners adopt a more holistic approach by not only communicating their vision, value, and belief in CSR but also to keep their CSR impact communicated to the public and consumers. Moreover, the degree of congruence between these two aspects and society may lead to an inappropriate understanding or implementation of CSR (Zenisek, 1979). Thus, practitioners can use interactive media channels to make sure that they are communicating with their stakeholders and appropriately responding to the demands toward the organization in regard to their CSR. Hence, while companies engage in communicating their societal issues strategically, it is important to take a more holistic and consistent social responsibility theme that will help consumers associate the company and its supporting cause through consistency where the positive business benefit can be elevated through their socially responsible conduct (Du et al., 2010).

Message Specific-ness

This research finds that the degree of specific-ness in CSR messages show results similar to those observed in the concreteness effect. That is, participants tend to respond more positively toward the company and its CSR when its message is more specific. Past research has defined message concreteness as the extent to which an ad copy activates visual imagery in consumers' minds (e.g., Fernandez & Rosen, 2000; Krishnan et al., 2006; MacKenzie, 1986; Rossiter & Percy, 1978). In contrast, this study examined the concreteness effect from another perspective, using a message that varied in how specific it was—more versus less specific (e.g., Feldman et al., 2006; Johnson & Kisielius, 1985; Macklin et al., 1985; Spreen & Schulz, 1966). The results reveal that when only the degree of specific-ness of CSR messages is altered, consumers react differently toward a company's CSR.

Moreover, this research suggests that message strategy makes a difference in how consumers respond to a company's CSR. It is important that marketers carefully craft stories that are more specific, detailed, and concrete. When the company's CSR message is more vague, general, and abstract, it is likely that consumers will grow suspicious (Grau et al., 2007) and more skeptical of the company's CSR. The relationship between message strategy and skepticism also implies that message specific-ness can influence the credibility of the message (Hansen & Wanke, 2010). Credibility has been shown to influence information processing and thus its impact on attitudes and intentions (Petty et al., 1983). Thus, it is important not only that they understand their audiences well, but that also they adopt an appropriate message strategy that can reduce skepticism and enhance the credibility of the message.

The findings also pose ethical questions regarding the use of such messages to create a socially responsible image. Messages that are more specific can often times mislead consumers to consider a company as more socially responsible. For example, Pracejus et al. (2004)

demonstrated that legally equivalent abstract copy formats of donation quantifier actually made a large difference in how consumers perceived donation level and their choices. Similarly, this research suggests that consumers are more likely to consider a company socially responsible when they see more specific CSR claims. That is, advertisers and marketers need to be careful when using more specific information, such as concrete quantifiers and messages; consumers may use such information as a cue to judge the company or its product as socially responsible. Marketers must consider the unintended effect of their claims, such as greenwashing claims that can mislead consumers and impact their decision making (Chen & Chang, 2013; Pracejus & Olsen, 2004).

The Interaction Effect of Company-Cause Fit and Message Specific-ness

The interaction effect of CC fit and message specific-ness offer insights into the cognitive processing literature and for practitioners building strategic CSR communication. The result implies that while consumers process a company's CSR differently when the degree of CC fit varies, the message specific-ness influenced their evaluation of a company and its CSR. The effect of message specific-ness is moderated when participants were in a low company-cause fit condition.

Research suggests that consumers engage in more elaboration when they perceive a company and its social cause as being incongruent and tend to generate more negative thoughts (Menon & Kahn, 2003; Simmons & Bekcer-Olsen, 2006). While consumers engage in elaboration, their ability to process the information may depend on various factors, such as the level of involvement (Greenwald & Leavitt, 1984; Petty et al., 1983), ability and knowledge (Alba & Hutchinson, 1997), cognitive capacity (Lang, 2006), and contextual information (Shapiro et al., 1997). All this impacts how people learn and process information (Campbell &

Kirmani, 2000; Poynor & Wood, 2009). Accordingly, a general consumer who lacks ability, knowledge, or cognitive motivation is likely to struggle to process the information.

The cognitive processing literature postulates that when individuals struggle to process information, they are more likely to construe information with an abstract mind-set (Alter & Oppenheimer, 2008). Thus, struggling to process a message influences consumer accessibility of information that varies in its abstractness. Researchers have continually found that when the commensurability of the information abstractness matches the individual mind-set, persuasion is increased (Aaker & Lee, 2001; Lee et al., 2009; Spassova & Lee, 2013). Accordingly, it is likely that company-cause fit influenced consumer accessibility to information that varied in its abstractness.

Also, this implies that the specific-ness of the CSR message enhanced the perceived incompatibility of the two pieces of information, which may, when CC fit was low, increase the elaboration of the information. Prior research demonstrates that people discount the experience of fluency as a diagnostic cue for judgments once they explicitly or implicitly recognize that this experience is no longer informative (Alter & Oppenheimer, 2009). Prior research has found that participants presented with product information in a disfluent condition (i.e., difficult to read font) are more likely to defer their choices than those in a control condition (i.e., standard font), due to differences in disfluency (Novemsky, Dhar, Schwarz, & Simonson, 2007).

On the other hand, research suggests that when consumers possess a more abstract mind-set, the perceived incompatibility of the information is reduced when it lessens the experience of disfluency. Accordingly, a more general message assists consumers as they try to focus more on its high-level goals and concepts (Fujita & Han, 2009; Liberman et al., 2002) such as the overall goal, mission, and vision of the CSR campaign. This lessens the perceived mismatch and helps

them more smoothly process the information (Hansen & Wanke, 2010; Novemsky et al., 2007). Therefore, this research suggests that specific-ness may influence the perceived fluency of CSR information that impacted the consumer's response to the company's socially responsible initiative (Novemsky et al., 2007).

The findings also imply marketers should have more careful thoughts while crafting CSR messages. It is important that they understand how people perceive the company and its supporting cause, that they perceive it as congruent, and marketers should exercise caution in crafting a specific story to communicate their CSR. A more specific message is perceived to be more tangible, real (Paivio, 1971; Paivio et al., 1968; Semin & Fiedler, 1988; Semin et al., 2005; Sherman, Cialdini, Schwartzman, & Reynolds, 1985) and more truthful (Hansen & Wanke, 2010). However, the vividness of the information can heighten the perceived incompatibility (Torelli et al., 2011) as consumers process inconsistent information.

Thus, if practitioners intend to form a socially responsible image by supporting a cause that is irrelevant to the company and its image, it is important that they use a more general message strategy (e.g., "We are committed to advocate for the art"; "We are committed to hunger relief"). Such a strategy helps consumers associate the message with the company's overall image. Moreover, message strategies can often prime a person's mind-set in such a way to help people process information. Priming an abstract mind-set through more general message tactics causes people to focus on its high-level aims and thereby construe the situation more abstractly. Priming a concrete mind-set, by using more specific message tactics, induces a more concrete representation of the details and aspects of the situation (Freitas, Gollwitzer, & Trope, 2004; Fujita & Han, 2009). Research suggests that an abstract mind-set—that is, one that focuses on the high-level aims or overall goal—helps people ease tension and process inconsistent

information. A concrete mind-set—that is, one that focuses on details and context—often heightens differences and creates more conflict. Therefore, practitioners may use appropriate message strategies in varying levels of company-cause fit to effectively communicate their socially responsible impact to their consumers.

Issues of Consumer Skepticism

This research also indicates that a key challenge to producing an effective CSR is overcoming consumer skepticism (Du et al., 2010). Across all three studies, the results suggested that whenever skepticism was available to the participants, they were less likely to generate favorable CSR responses.

Researchers have argued that skepticism often triggers persuasion knowledge (Friestad & Wright, 1994) that can bolster persuasion (Isaac & Greyson, 2017). Yet, the current study reveals that consumers in general used skepticism as a cue to discount a company's CSR claim. This is assumed to be due to consumers not being motivated to process information from an ad or a company (MacInnis et al., 1991) as well as to their lack cognitive resources to analyze the marketer's message; the resources they are lacking may include knowledge (Alba & Hutchinson, 1997), contextual information, (Shapiro et al., 1997) and cognitive capacity (Meyers-Levy & Malaviya, 1999; Malaviya et al., 1996). Accordingly, while they elaborate and make judgments, the skepticism and the distrust of the marketers' claim or behavior worked as a cognitive shortcut to evaluate the company's CSR (MacCoun, 1998).

As researchers have postulated, skepticism disrupts people from seeing a company's CSR as authentic (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001) and leads to more negative responses (Menon & Kahn 2003; Rifon et al., 2004; Yoon et al., 2006). Therefore, it is vital important that practitioners be aware of corporate scandals, say a crisis from a company within the same

industry (Laufer & Wang, 2018), that might affect the level of skepticism of a company's CSR practice. By understanding consumer skepticism, practitioners may know how to communicate their CSR through crafting appropriate message strategies.

LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

There are several limitations in this study and suggestions for future research. First of all, this research selected a message that varied in its level of specific-ness. An interesting avenue to extend this research may be a more absolute way to examine the messages, as the level of perceived generality or specificity often varies by individual differences, context, and situations.

This study also created a fictitious company to control extraneous factors in the study. Future research could replicate this study by using a real brand or company to increase the external validity of the findings. In addition, future research could use more extreme ways to manipulate the levels of fit. There was a significant difference between how subjects rated their thoughts about the fit on the manipulation check scale. Nonetheless, in the main tests, both levels of fit were over the mid-point, 4. It is assumed that this occurred because participants had no prior knowledge of the fictitious brand (all created through description). It is unclear how much the manipulation helped them form or recall the created image of the company and then connect with the societal cause the company was advocating. Therefore, replicating the study with a real company/brand may help researchers better understand the impact of a real versus an imaginary company on consumer responses.

Another interesting avenue of research would be to investigate the deeper mechanism of the interaction of company-cause fit and the message specific-ness effect from the cognitive processing perspective. Such a study should shed light on how consumers respond to a company's CSR messages. According to research, cognitive fluency in processing information

influences the extent to which individuals develop an abstract or a concrete mind-set (Hansen & Wanke, 2010; Torelli et al., 2011; Wagner et al., 2009). Although this research speculates about these relationships, it did not specifically measure message fluency as a mediator in the framework. Thus, for future research, it would be worthwhile to examine the effect of cognitive fluency on consumers in terms of their response in the interaction effect.

Moreover, future research could examine the role of fit in how consumers construe a company's CSR information. For example, Connors et al. (2017) argued that skepticism led consumers to develop a concrete mind-set while interpreting a company's CSR message. Consequently, these consumers are more likely to respond more favorably to a concrete CSR message than an abstract CSR message. In this research, researchers suggested that a low company-cause fit triggers attribution or skepticism of the company's CSR motive. However, consumers generally responded more favorably to a general message than a more specific message. It would be interesting now to scrutinize the relationship of consumer mind-set, message specific-ness, and CC fit.

Finally, the literature suggests that information processing generally depends on consumer knowledge (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987) of the issue, brand, product, and tactics (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Accordingly, it would be an interesting avenue of research to investigate what role consumer knowledge plays in a consumer's processing of a company's CSR message when the message varies in degree of CC fit and specific-ness.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Company's Description of Knip Foods

Company Information of Knip Foods

Knip Foods is an American multinational company that produces protein-focused food, such as chicken, beef, and pork. It offers processed and pre-cooked meats. Knip Foods provides protein to many national restaurant chains, including quick service, casual, mid-scale, and fine dining restaurants. In addition, Knip Foods sells prepared food products through all major retail distribution channels.

Appendix B: Stimuli of Advertisements I

Study 1. Types of Company-cause fit: High versus Low

Knip Foods



Helping to Support the Arts in the U.S.

At Knip Foods, we are committed to support the arts. We established the Knip Foods Arts Fund. Our goal is to provide \$1 million over two years to non-profit organizations to support the work of outstanding artists, curators, scholars, and endeavors to strengthen performing arts organizations, art museums, research institutes, and conservation centers.

Knip Foods



Helping to Fight Hunger in the U.S.

At Knip Foods, we are committed to support domestic hunger-relief programs. We established the Knip Foods Innovation Fund. Our goal is to provide \$1 million over two years to food banks to build innovative local and national food sourcing programs to reach people, such as children, seniors and families and provide food to where they are and when they need it the most.

Appendix C: Stimuli of Advertisements II

Study 2. Types of Messages: General versus Specific

High-fit condition: General versus Specific



Knip Foods regularly donates large funds for hunger relief.

Knip Foods regularly donates large funds for hunger relief.
At Knip Foods, we are committed to supporting our resources to a non-profit organization to improve their ability in distributing fresh foods through many food banks.

Knip Foods regularly donates large funds for hunger relief

At Knip Foods, we are committed to supporting our resources to a non-profit organization to improve their ability in distributing fresh foods through many food banks.



Knip Foods annually donates \$2 million for hunger relief.

Knip Foods annually donates \$2 million for hunger relief.
At Knip Foods, we are committed to supporting cash and employee volunteering to a non-profit organization to increase their operational efficiency in distributing fresh foods through 100 food banks.

Knip Foods annually donates \$2 million for hunger relief.

At Knip Foods, we are committed to supporting cash and employee volunteering to a non-profit organization to increase their operational efficiency in distributing fresh foods through 100 food banks.

Appendix D: Stimuli of Advertisements III

Study 3. Types of A Company-Cause Fit and Message Specific-ness

A Low CC fit condition: General versus Specific



Knip Foods regularly donates large funds to support the Art in America.

At Knip Foods, we are regularly giving our resources to the Art non-profit organization. We helped many emerging artists grow and achieve their goal.



Knip Foods annually donates \$ 2 million to support the Art in America.

At Knip Foods, we are annually donating money and employee volunteering to the Art non-profit organization. We helped 170 emerging artists develop art skills and acquire internships.

A High CC fit condition: General versus Specific



Knip Foods regularly donates large funds to support hunger relief in America.

At Knip Foods, we are regularly giving our resources to the Hunger Relief non-profit organization. We helped many food banks distribute fresh foods to people in need.



Knip Foods annually donates \$ 2 million to support hunger relief in America.

At Knip Foods, we are annually donating money and employee volunteering to the Hunger Relief non-profit organization. We helped 170 food banks distribute fresh produce to low-income neighborhoods.

Appendix E: Fit Measurement
(Speed & Thomson, 2000)

Conceptual definition of company-cause fit. Fit is the degree to which a consumer perceives congruence between a core operation of the firm and the nature of the cause it sponsors (Sen & Bhattacharya 2001; Simmons & Becker-Olsen 2006; Varadarajan & Menon 1988)

Please indicate your level of thoughts on each of the following word that describes the company and its supporting social cause.

1. There is a logical connection between XX's core business and the nature of supporting YY.

Strongly Disagree ___:___:___:___:___:___:___ Strongly Agree

2. The image of XX's core business and the nature of supporting YY are similar.

Strongly Disagree ___:___:___:___:___:___:___ Strongly Agree

3. XX's core business and the nature of supporting YY fit together well.

Strongly Disagree ___:___:___:___:___:___:___ Strongly Agree

4. XX's core business and the nature of supporting YY stand for similar things.

Strongly Disagree ___:___:___:___:___:___:___ Strongly Agree

5. It makes sense to me that XX's business supports for YY.

Strongly Disagree ___:___:___:___:___:___:___ Strongly Agree

Appendix F: Message Specific-ness Measurement

(MacKenzie, 1986)

Conceptual definition of message specific-ness. Message specific-ness is defined as a message varying in terms of the graded notion of abstractness-concreteness that refers generic versus specific information (e.g., Feldman, Bearden and Hardesty 2006; Johnson and Kisielius 1985; Macklin, Bruvold and Shea 1985; Spreen and Schulz 1966; Johnson and Fornell 1987; Wiemer-Hastings and Xu 2005

Please indicate your level of thoughts on each of the following word that describes the company's social responsibility message.

Detail	___:___:___:___:___:___:___	Sketchy
Explicit	___:___:___:___:___:___:___	Vague
Vivid	___:___:___:___:___:___:___	Dull
Concrete	___:___:___:___:___:___:___	Abstract
Specific	___:___:___:___:___:___:___	General

Appendix G: Consumer Skepticism toward CSR
(Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013)

Conceptual definition of consumer skepticism. Consumer skepticism is defined as their distrust or disbelief of a company's corporate social responsibility (Forehand & Grier 2003; Obermiller & Spangenberg 1998, Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013, Webb & Mohr 1998)

1. I am _____ that Knip Foods is a socially responsible company.

Doubtless ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: Doubtful

2. I am _____ that Knip Foods is concerned to improve the well-being of society.

Certain ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: Uncertain

3. I am _____ that Knip Foods follows high ethical standards.

Sure ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: Unsure

4. It is _____ that Knip Foods acts in a socially responsible way.

Unquestionable ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: Questionable

Appendix H: Attitudes toward the advertisement

(Olney et al., 1991)

For each of the following questions, please choose the position between a pair of words that best represents your thoughts about the main message in Knip Foods' ad.

- | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------------------------------|
| unpleasant | __: | __: | __: | __: | __: | __: | __: | pleasant |
| fun to watch | __: | __: | __: | __: | __: | __: | __: | not fun to watch |
| not entertaining | __: | __: | __: | __: | __: | __: | __: | entertaining |
| Important | __: | __: | __: | __: | __: | __: | __: | not important |
| informative | __: | __: | __: | __: | __: | __: | __: | uninformative |
| helpful | __: | __: | __: | __: | __: | __: | __: | not helpful |
| useful | __: | __: | __: | __: | __: | __: | __: | not useful |
| makes me curious | __: | __: | __: | __: | __: | __: | __: | does not make me
curious |
| not boring | __: | __: | __: | __: | __: | __: | __: | boring |
| Interesting | __: | __: | __: | __: | __: | __: | __: | not interesting |
| keeps my
attention | __: | __: | __: | __: | __: | __: | __: | does not keep my
attention |

Appendix I: Attitudes toward the company

(Spears & Singh, 2004)

For each of the following questions, please choose the position between a pair of words that best represents your feelings about Knip Foods.

- Unappealing ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: Appealing
- Unpleasant ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: Good
- Dislikable ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: likable
- Unfavorable ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: Favorable
- bad ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: good
- high-quality ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: low-quality
- uninteresting ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: interesting
- not distinctive ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: distinctive
- negative ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: positive
- important ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: unimportant
- unattractive ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: attractive
- unfriendly ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: friendly
- not nice ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: nice

Appendix J: Socially Responsible Image

(Berens et al., 2005; Brown & Dacin, 1997)

Please tell us how you think about Knip Foods by clicking on the button that most appropriately indicates your extent of agreement with the statement (1 = strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree).

1. *Knip Foods is a socially responsible company.*

Strongly disagree ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: Strongly agree

2. *Knip Foods is concerned to improve the well-being of society.*

Strongly disagree ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: Strongly agree

3. *Knip Foods behaves responsibly regarding the environment.*

Strongly disagree ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: Strongly agree

4. *Knip Foods has made a real difference through its socially responsible actions.*

Strongly disagree ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: Strongly agree

Appendix K: Supportive Intention

(Coombs, 1999)

Please tell us how you think about Knip Foods by clicking on the button that most appropriately indicates your extent of agreement with the statement (1 = strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree).

1. I will say nice things about XXX to others.

Strongly disagree ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: Strongly agree

2. I will sign a petition in support of XXX.

Strongly disagree ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: Strongly agree

3. I will contact a government official in support of XXX.

Strongly disagree ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: Strongly agree

4. I will engage in actions to support XXX.

Strongly disagree ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: Strongly agree

5. I will recommend XXX to my friends as their future employer

Strongly disagree ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: Strongly agree

Appendix L: Product Evaluation

(Kim, 2014)

Please tell us how you think about the product and service of Knip Foods by clicking on the button that most appropriately indicates your extent of agreement with the statement (1 = strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree).

1. I am interested in XXX's service or product.

Strongly disagree ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: Strongly agree

2. I assume XXX's service or product is reliable.

Strongly disagree ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: Strongly agree

3. I think XXX's service or product is trustworthy.

Strongly disagree ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: Strongly agree

4. I think XXX's service or product has good quality.

Strongly disagree ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: Strongly agree

5. My overall expectation about XXX's service or product is favorable.

Strongly disagree ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: Strongly agree

Appendix M: Perceived Uniqueness

(Keller 1993)

Please tell us how you think about Knip Foods by clicking on the button that most appropriately indicates your extent of agreement with the statement (1 = strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree).

1. XXX is distinct from other brands of (same industry)

Strongly disagree ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: Strongly agree

2. XXX is very different from other (same industry)

Strongly disagree ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: Strongly agree

3. XXX really stands out from other (same industry)

Strongly disagree ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: Strongly agree

4. XXX is unique from other (same industry)

Strongly disagree ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: Strongly agree

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