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**Doing Good While Playing: The Effects of Corporate Social Responsibility Gamification on Consumer Response**

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# Doing Good While Playing: The Effects of Corporate Social Responsibility Gamification on Consumer Response

by

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, *Lee Je Sung* and *Jungmin Jung*, who have been energy sources for me to move forward throughout my entire life and to my brother, *Chi Hoon Sung*, who I deeply appreciate for hanging in there with me.

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**Doing Good While Playing: The Effects of Corporate Social Responsibility Gamification on Consumer Response**

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This dissertation research explored how CSR functions in a new media platform. Specifically, this research investigated the impact of game narratives and company placement on consumer response. In addition, a moderating role of CSR support was examined. A 2 (game narratives: CSR vs. self-serving) × 2 (company placement: prominent vs. subtle) × 2 (CSR support: high vs. low) factorial experimental design was employed. A mobile web-based game was developed for stimuli. As expected, findings showed that those who played the game with a CSR narrative responded more favorably toward both the game and the company than those who played the game with a self-serving narrative. The research found also an interplay between game narratives and company placement on consumer response. Specifically, in terms of a CSR-narrative game condition, participants exposed to a prominently placed company logo evaluated the company more favorably than participants exposed to a logo placed subtly. On the other hand, for a self-serving game condition, the company evaluation was more positive in a subtly-placed condition than in a prominently-placed condition. Instead of CSR support, a moderating role of fit between the company and the cause was found. Implications and future research are discussed.

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# Chapter 1:   Introduction

Through corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, large companies these days endeavor to contribute to the welfare of communities and society-at-large in various ways. In 2013, for example, U.S. and U.K. Global 500 companies together spent $15.2 billion on CSR projects (Smith, 2014). About 80% of Fortune Global 500 companies publish CSR reports to describe their efforts (SteamFeed, 2014). According to a recent report released by the 2016 PwC Global CEO survey, 64% of 1,409 CEOs in 83 countries consider CSR to be a core value of their businesses (PwC, 2016).

In addition to making social contributions, businesses also seek to benefit through CSR activities to gain favorable publicity (Till & Nowak, 2000), enhanced consumer attitudes toward the company and its brands (Andreasen, 1996), a favorable reputation, trust and brand loyalty (Carroll & Buchholtz, 2014), and increased sales (Drumwright, 1996). Indeed, consumers have responded positively to corporate socially responsible efforts. According to Cone Communications (2015), a majority of global consumers reported that companies that engage in social causes are considered to have a more positive image (93%), more trust (90%), and more loyalty (88%). Furthermore, 90% of survey respondents stated they are likely to switch to brands that are involved in a good cause under conditions of similar price and quality (Cone Communications, 2015). A significant number of respondents to the Cone Communications survey considered a company's commitments to social initiatives when they make decisions such as "which companies they want to see doing business in their community" (84%), "what to buy or where to shop" (84%), "which products and services to recommend to people" (82%), and even "where to work" (79%; Cone Communications, 2015). Numerous respondents reported that their purchase experiences over the past 12 months were associated with

socially responsible products. While about half the respondents (53%) refused to purchase products/services of a company they considered to have behaved irresponsibly, 63% bought products that support social/environmental benefits (Cone Communications, 2015).

Reflecting the interest of companies and consumers in CSR initiatives, extensive research on various aspects of CSR has been conducted over the past 20 years. Studies in the early stages focused on providing evidence that corporate involvement in CSR activities is effective in various ways, including publicity, reputation, image, consumer attitude and loyalty, and purchase behavior (Andreasen, 1996; Carroll & Buchholtz, 2014; Drumwright, 1996; Golin-Harris, 2005; Till & Nowak, 2000). Beyond studies on the impact of corporate engagement in CSR initiatives, more recent research has started to pay greater attention to factors that increase the efficacy of CSR activities. That line of research includes studies on message content (e.g., Baghi, Rubaltelli, & Tedeschi, 2009), cause proximity (e.g., Grau & Folse, 2007), brand types (e.g., Jeong, Paek, & Lee, 2013), consumer demographics and psychographics (e.g., Cui et al., 2013; Ross, Patterson, & Stutts, 1992; Youn & Kim, 2008), company-cause fit (e.g., Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2007; Hamlin & Wilson, 2004), and CSR support (e.g., Pérez & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). Those studies provide insights into what types of causes and specific messages need to be considered in the execution of CSR activities and how CSR-information processing varies according to consumer characteristics.

Despite the popularity of CSR initiatives among corporations and the positive outcomes that are expected from consumers, several challenges have been observed. For example, consumer skepticism about CSR initiatives has been on the rise (Bardetti, 2017; Bida, 2013; Elving & van Vuuren, 2011; Vaccaro, 2016). While consumer support for companies that are committed to social issues has steadily increased (Cone

Communications, 2004), today's consumers are becoming savvier when it comes to CSR initiatives (Cone Communications, 2015). Due to a growing awareness about CSR, consumers have also become more critical about a company's motivations to engage in CSR activities (Bardetti, 2017; Bida, 2013; Elving & van Vuuren, 2011; Vaccaro, 2016). The survey by Cone Communications (2015) mentioned above showed that half the respondents wanted evidence to prove a company's responsibility before they were ready to believe its commitments.

Additionally, greenwashing issues have received significant attention (Johnson, 2017; Watson, 2016). Greenwashing is a term that refers to a company's misleading claims about the environmental benefits of its products, services, and/or technologies. The Volkswagen emissions scandal in 2015 is a prime example of greenwashing. Volkswagen was caught cheating on carbon dioxide emissions tests of its diesel cars that are considered to be one of the main contributors to environmental pollution problems worldwide. Volkswagen continues to struggle for resolution of that issue (Colvin, 2017). In early 2017, Walmart, the largest retailer in the U.S., was alleged to have deceived consumers with its misleading labels on plastic products as "biodegradable" or "compostable" (Hardcastle, 2017). The increase in greenwashing scandals is thought to have raised consumers' skepticism that corporate socially responsible initiatives do not actually operate in the ways the companies claim.

Another challenge in the execution of CSR initiatives relates to the myriad of CSR activities and constant reminders that have saturated the marketplace, leading to CSR weariness among consumers (Berglind & Nakata, 2005; Crane, 2013; Crane & Matten, 2013; Shaw, 2016; UQ News, 2010). The Green Gauge Global report pointed out that the decline in sales of green products indicates consumers' enthusiasm for environmentally-friendly products is diminishing (Newell, 2010) even though CSR has

gained momentum and matured (Cone Communications, 2015). Against that background, it is logical to expect that as consumers are becoming savvier, more discriminating, and oftentimes less interested, companies claim to be socially responsible but fail to convince consumers of their contributions.

Together, issues such as consumer skepticism and CSR weariness may contribute to a slump in consumer support and engagement for CSR initiatives and other philanthropic causes that companies have sought to champion. As a result, the novelty and distinction that once brought CSR projects to prominence accompanied by positive outcomes are no longer guaranteed.

Given the challenges that CSR faces, new approaches to reinvigorate consumer participation in CSR projects are obviously needed. One proposal, set forth by Cone Communications (2015), is for companies to engage consumers more fully in CSR initiatives by offering opportunities for them to interact with CSR activities through a combination of stories and data. In particular, more approachable and dynamic ways of interaction are recommended through infographics, videos, and games for the purpose of communicating CSR-related information (Cone Communications, 2015; 2016). Through more interactive ways, companies have the opportunity to serve as catalysts for consumer involvement in CSR initiatives by promoting consumer donations, volunteerism, and advocacy in society (Cone Communications, 2015).

With advancements in technology, especially mobile devices, one approach for gaining consumer attention is to engage consumers through *gamification* of CSR projects (Crane & Matten, 2013; McClimon, 2014; Owen, 2013). Gamification refers to the integration of game mechanisms into non-game systems, such as education and marketing, to increase individuals' engagement and loyalty (Deterding et al., 2011; Zicherman & Linder, 2013). The market value of gamification is expected to reach

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$5,500 billion in 2018, compared to $1,707 billion in 2015 (eLearning Infographics, 2015). This dramatic growth indicates that a gamification strategy is being adopted by various sectors of the marketplace. Since 2010, major consumer brands such as Nike, Microsoft, Target, IBM, McDonald's, eBay, and Panera have launched gamification projects to create and sustain engagement with consumers and to challenge competitors (Zichermann, 2013; Zichermann & Linder, 2013). For example, *Nike+* has taken advantage of gamified feedback so that by 2012 more than 5 million individuals were able to achieve their daily workout goals, amounting to a collective 450 million miles (Zichermann & Linder, 2013). In another arena, RecycleBank has encouraged people to participate in its recycling project (Chou, 2017) where points are awarded to players who recycle, save energy, and answer sustainability quizzes. The points can be used to buy actual goods at retail stores, such as Walmart and Best Buy.

As the statistics and examples demonstrate, gamification is considered to be an effective and engaging tool for corporate communication. Zichermann and Linder (2013) describe gamification as "the process of engaging audiences by leveraging the best of loyalty programs, game design, and behavioral economics" (p. xii). A biased-perception about game play exists among the public because of its negative effects that can lead to addiction, increased aggression, and health issues (Griffiths, 2014). Nevertheless, game play is a fun activity that can also serve as a useful and powerful mechanism capable of motivating individual interest and engagement and driving behavioral changes (Zichermann & Linder, 2013). From the perspective of loyalty-orientation, a campaign conducted by Tabasco in 2011 provides an interesting example. Tabasco launched an ambassador program, *Tabasco Nation,* on social media to promote consumer engagement with its full line of products. Loyal customers, the target of the campaign, were asked to upload information about their daily Tabasco sauce usage with food photos. For their

participation, customers were awarded points, badges, and/or prizes and received the designation of Mayor, Governor, Senator, and/or Ambassador. Through this fun and gamified campaign, Tabasco built two-way conversations with its fans.

The corporate attempts described above suggest that gamification can be used also for companies to promote consumer engagement for CSR initiatives. One of the first gamification projects associated with a CSR campaign was introduced by Humana, a major healthcare company. Its gamified CSR programs include the *Humana Horsepower Challenge* and *HumanaVitality*. The *Horsepower Challenge* program encourages students to become more active and adopt healthy lifestyles. Participants wear pedometers on their shoes that keep track of their daily activity. The records are uploaded to a website (humanagames.com) where participants can enjoy an online game. In that game, participants have their own horse avatars and take a journey with their teammates based on the distance they earn from their daily steps. The goal of this gamified initiative is to increase participants' activity levels and reduce rates of obesity. Another company, Double A, a pulp and paper manufacturer, supports a campaign to plant trees in areas under desertification (e.g., Sudan, Mongolia, South Korea, Thailand) through a mobile game application called *Tree Planet*. In that game, players grow virtual trees in an area of their choice. Once the trees are fully grown in the game, actual trees will be planted on behalf of the players in their pre-selected areas with the names of the players who made those plantings possible. As another example, in cooperation with the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Allainz, a financial services company, launched an online game called *CEO2* to promote awareness of the need to reduce carbon emissions. By building on capabilities offered by new media, various corporate gamification activities provide fresh and flexible options to engage consumers in CSR initiatives (Capriotti, 2011).

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Despite recent advances, scant research has been conducted to determine the effectiveness of CSR gamification even though the approach holds significant potential for overcoming consumer loss of interest in CSR initiatives. This current study, therefore, investigates the effects of CSR games on consumer response. First, a comprehensive review of the literature on CSR is presented based on three elements: the cause, the company, and the consumer. Second, the literature on game play is integrated into a conceptual framework of CSR gamification that includes key elements of CSR and game play. The identified key elements are game narratives (a factor related to the cause), brand placement (a company factor), and players' support for the cause (a consumer factor). Third, based on the proposed framework, the overarching research questions of this dissertation are: How do narratives and brand placement function in a game to influence consumer response to the company? What is the interplay between narratives and brand placement on CSR effectiveness? How does the impact of narratives and brand placement vary according to the level of a game player's support for the CSR cause?

Theoretically, the current research contributes to the CSR literature by incorporating aspects of the literature on gamification and game play. In particular, this research offers insights into how CSR initiatives are able to function on a new media platform. Managerially, this research seeks to help practitioners gauge the impact of CSR gamification and the extent to which CSR gamification can serve as a feasible mechanism to overcome CSR skepticism and weariness and, therefore, lead to improved CSR consumer engagement.

This dissertation is organized as follows. In Chapter 2, an extensive review of previous literature on CSR, gamification, and game play is provided. Based on the literature review, an integrated framework is proposed and hypotheses are put forth in Chapter 3. Research methods described in Chapter 4 include the experimental design

used in this study, stimuli development, sampling and procedure, and measurements. Results of data analysis are presented in Chapter 5. Given the results, Chapter 6 reports additional analyses and results to enhance our understanding of factors from the literature that are deemed important. Finally, Chapter 7 presents overall findings and discussion that include limitations and suggested future research.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

**CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR)**

**CSR Definitions**

In recent decades, businesses have been encouraged to be more socially responsible and, therefore, have increasingly become more involved in the promotion of social causes (Engle, 2007; Welford & Frost, 2006) via donating money to philanthropic causes as well as volunteering and/or providing their marketing and management expertise to non-profit organizations (Andreasen, Goodstein, & Wilson, 2005). CSR is the term that encompasses companies' such activities that are distinct from business ventures designed strictly for profit-making purposes.

Given the multitude of CSR campaigns, much research has been conducted, yet little agreement on the definition of CSR has been reached (Dahlsrud, 2008; Lii, Wu, & Ding, 2013). Based on an extensive review of the literature, Dahlsrud (2008) identified 37 definitions of CSR and categorized them along five dimensions: environmental, social, economic, stakeholder, and voluntariness. The environmental dimension means the CSR definition that includes the natural environment (e.g., "environmental concerns in business operations," "a cleaner environment"). The social dimension covers the relationship between business and society (e.g., "contribute to a better society," "integrate social concerns in their business operations"). The economic dimension involves socio-economic or financial aspects of a business operation (e.g., "preserving the profitability," "business operations") and the stakeholder dimension deals with stakeholders or stakeholder groups (e.g., "interaction with their stakeholders," "treating the stakeholders of the firm"). The final dimension, voluntariness, contains the notion of actions not prescribed by law (e.g., "beyond legal obligations," "voluntary"). For example, the

Commission of the European Community (2001) defines CSR as "a concept whereby companies integrate *social* and *environmental* concerns in their *business* operations and in their interaction with their *stakeholders* on a *voluntary* basis". This definition includes the five dimensions of CSR.

Carroll (1979, 1991) suggested a pyramid of CSR that encompasses economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibility (bottom to top). Carroll (1979) further argued that the four components are ordered, rather than cumulative so that the focus of businesses tends to move from the economic aspect to then to the legal, ethical, and philanthropic aspects. Sen and Bhattacharya (2001) also pointed out that the conceptualization of CSR ranges from an economic aspect (e.g., maximizing shareholder's value) (Zenisek, 1979) to a comprehensively social and proactive aspect (e.g., corporations' long-term role in a social system) (McGee, 1998).

Scholars have suggested that multiple CSR components should be addressed simultaneously (Carroll, 1991; Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002; Van Marrewijk, 2003), and indeed, broader societal issues have recently risen to prominence as CSR initiatives. Aligned with that, it is recommended that CSR be approached from a broad point of view (Alniacik, Alniacik, & Genc, 2011; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). Davis and Blomstrom (1975) defined CSR as "the managerial obligation to take action to protect and improve both the welfare of society as a whole and the interest of organizations" (p. 6). Carroll (1979) viewed the role of CSR as "to encompass the economic, legal, ethical and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations at a given point of time" (Alniacik et al., 2011, p. 235). Brown and Dacin (1997) referred to CSR as a company's "status and activities with respect to its perceived societal obligations" (p. 68). Taking a similar perspective, McWilliams and Siegel (2001) depicted CSR as "actions that appear

to further some social good, beyond the interests of the firm and that which is required by law" (p. 117).

Despite various and broad definitions, CSR is generally agreed to encompass projects whereby corporations aim to provide support to a social cause beyond their own interests. Although not defined explicitly, the primary purpose of CSR initiatives is for corporations to meet societal and consumer expectations for the communities to which the businesses belong.

**CSR Types**

According to Polonsky and Speed (2001), there are three types of CSR initiatives: philanthropy, sponsorship, and cause-related marketing (CRM). Philanthropy encompasses a corporation's contribution of cash or in-kind donations as a return to or investment of its profits into the community without expectation of a direct return (Collins, 1994; Mescon & Tilson, 1987). As distinguished from philanthropy where the corporation does not expect a direct benefit from its donation, sponsorship by a corporation of a cause, on the other hand, seeks to establish an association between the company and cause in return for the company's support. Sponsorship is basically a part of a company's marketing activities for commercial advantage. The third type of CSR initiatives, CRM, similar to sponsorship, is motivated by the company's goal to generate profits from support of a cause. However, unlike sponsorship, CRM relies on consumers' action such as purchases (Jeong et al., 2013; Seitanidi & Ryan, 2007). Varandarajan and Menon (1988) defined CRM as "the process of formulating and implementing marketing activities that are characterized by an offer from the firm to contribute a specified amount to a designated cause when consumers engage in revenue-providing exchanges that

satisfy organizational and individual objectives" (p. 60). Given that CRM is based on a transaction, the amounts of donations vary according to consumers' level of participation.

Lee et al. (2005) and Kotler et al. (2012) further categorized CSR initiatives into six types: cause promotions, CRM, corporate social marketing, corporate philanthropy, community volunteering (or employee engagement), and socially responsible business practices. Cause promotions involve a corporation's donation of funds or corporate resources such as volunteer recruitment for a cause promotion. CRM refers to the contribution of a portion of a corporate's revenues to a cause based on sales. Corporate social marketing covers a corporation commitment to a campaign for behavior change such as public health, safety, the environment, or the community. Corporate philanthropy refers to a corporation's direct support for a cause or non-profit organization with donations of cash and in-kind resources. Community volunteering encompasses a company's contribution to local communities in the form of volunteer activities from those who are affiliated with the company (e.g., employees, retail partners and/or franchise members). Finally, socially responsible business practices involve a company's adjustment of its business practices and investments for social causes such as environmental protection.

Given that CSR is a concept broadly applied in many different situations, it is difficult to compile an exhaustive collection of categories. Overall, those listed above offer advantages as well as disadvantages. Compared to classifications suggested by Polonsky and Speed (2001), those suggested by Lee and colleagues (2005) covers more various and detailed CSR types. However, confusion arises in that there are several kinds of CSR initiatives that cannot be clearly differentiated. For example, the criteria for distinguishing a cause promotion and corporate social marketing are vague in that, to a certain extent, both types of CSR projects involve providing a cause-related promotion or

campaign with corporate support. Conversely, while Lee and colleagues' categorizations are specific, Polonsky and Speed's (2012) classifications clearer criteria with regard to stakeholders' roles. In addition, three types of CSR initiatives are more parsimonious for theory development relative to antecedent, moderating, and mediating factors.

**CSR Domains**

From the comprehensive perspective, CSR initiatives encompass extensive domains. Grunig (1979) suggested 11 items to describe CSR areas of concern: pollution, quality of products and services, decay of cities, high cost of living, monopolistic businesses, quality of education, support of charitable organizations, corporate profits, employees' self-fulfillment at work, employment of such groups as minorities, women, or the handicapped, and unemployment. In 1999, Kinder, Lydenberg, and Domini Research & Analytics categorized CSR initiatives according to six domains: community support, diversity, employee support, environment, non-U.S. operations, and product (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004). That categorization was extended in 2006 to include more broadly seven domains: employee relations and diversity programs, ethical materials sourcing, product design, marketing programs, the environment, human rights, and corporate governance. Chahal and Sharma (2006) suggested six additional categories: operational support (e.g., operations with ethics and integrity), employees support (e.g., safety, job security), community support (e.g., education, health), product/services (e.g., product safety, delivery), environmental support (e.g., waste management, recycling), and miscellaneous support (active participation in non- native country development) (Rao, 2005; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Staples, 2004).

The above literature suggests CSR domains are likely to change with the times. Considering CSR activities are a kind of interaction of corporations with their social

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systems (McGee, 1998), issues that corporations should be engaged in might depend on what their society want them to be involved in.

**Factors to Understand How CSR Works**

As the extensive range of research suggests, that are innumerable factors that weigh upon the effectiveness of CSR initiatives. Those factors are considered to be composed of three basic elements: the CSR cause, the company that is involved in the cause, and the consumers.
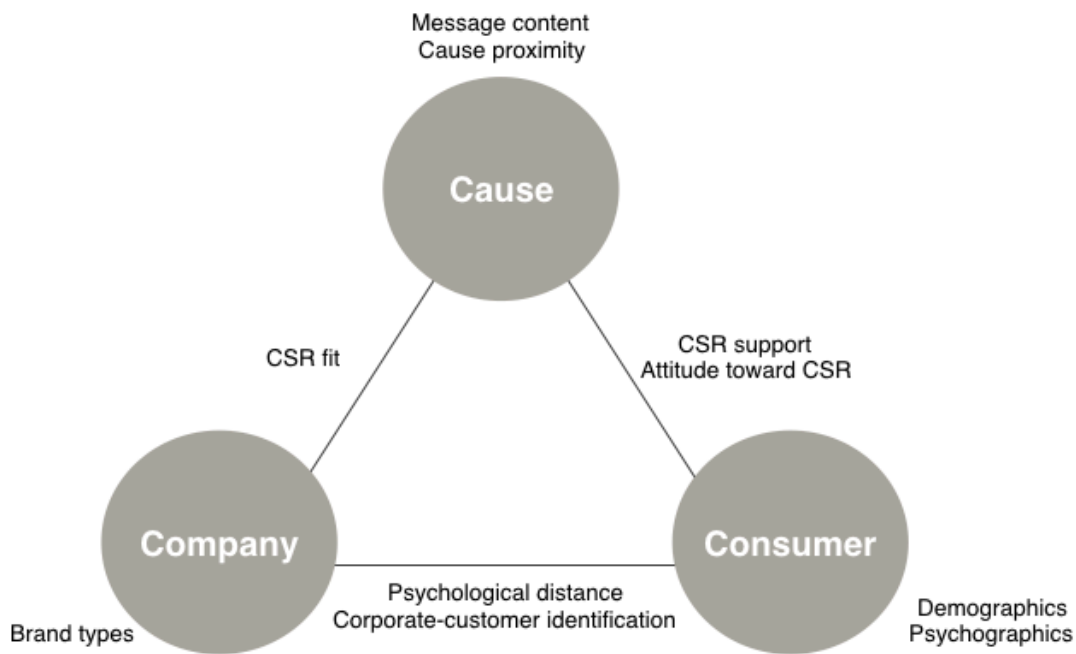
Figure 1:     Factors Related to the Three Elements of CSR

*Cause-related Factors*

Studies that focus on cause-related factors address how CSR messages need to be delivered with what types of content (i.e., CSR message content/appeal) and what kinds of social causes are effective for consumers (i.e., cause proximity). For example, the

literature suggests that vivid messages (e.g., a campaign against world starvation) lead to more preferable reactions for CRM programs than pallid messages (e.g., the international campaign to help Ethiopian malnourished and starving population victims of serious food deprivation) (Baghi et al., 2009). According to a content analysis conducted by Pracejus, Olsen and Brown (2003), a majority of CSR messages are abstract (e.g., a portion of the proceeds will be donated) rather than calculable (e.g., X% of the price will be donated). Yet, other studies have found that the level of message abstractness relative to size of donation creates skepticism toward the message and thus causes individuals to disbelieve the CSR message, compared to concrete CSR messages (Kim & Lee, 2009). In terms of cause proximity, although consumers seem to have a tendency to prefer local causes to national ones, the tendency varies by other factors such as cause involvement and consumer demographics (Grau & Folse, 2007; La Ferle, Kuber & Edwards, 2013; Ross et al., 1992). Specifically, studies demonstrate that a positive response to a local donation appeal is only effective for those less involved in a cause (Grau & Folse, 2007).

*Company-related Factors*

The literature on company-related factors focuses on characteristics of products, brands, and companies. For example, in general, findings show that CRM messages are more effective for consumers who purchase hedonic or frivolous products (e.g., ice cream, frozen yogurt) than utilitarian or practical necessities (e.g., laundry detergent, toothpaste) because of affect-based complementarity (Chang, 2011; Strahilevitz, 1999; Strahilevitz & Myers, 1998). That is, while pleasure-oriented consumption of frivolous items is likely to induce guilt, the altruistic behavior such as charitable giving tends to reduce guilt (Batson & Coke, 1981; O'Cass & McEwen, 2004). In addition to brand types, company proximity also seems to have a positive impact on consumer responses.

Thus, consumers tend to show more favorable responses to CSR initiatives presented by a national company than by a multi-national company (La Ferle et al., 2013).

*Consumer-related Factors*

Also important in influencing responses to CSR initiatives are consumer characteristics such as demographics and psychographics. For example, prior research suggests that women show greater support for CRM activities than men (Cone Communications, 2004; Ross et al., 1992; Webster, 2005). In terms of age, it has been demonstrated that the college age, Generation Y, is also responsive to CSR activities (Cui et al., 2003). Along with this demographic information, psychographic factors such as locus of control, public self-consciousness, interpersonal trust, advertising skepticism, personal and social responsibility, religiosity, social network, and previous prosocial behaviors have been found to influence consumer responses to CRM campaigns (Youn & Kim, 2008).

*Cause-Company Factors*

Moreover, factors that are involved in more than one element are important in determining consumer responses to CSR activities. The perceived fit, which is the extent to which consumers perceive a brand and a social cause to be similar and compatible (Lafferty, 2007), is a cause-company factor that scholars have most often paid attention to (Nan & Heo, 2007; Pracejus & Olsen, 2004; Samu & Wymer, 2009). In general, the literature indicates that the fit between a brand and a social cause convey a favorable influence on responses to CSR activities (Du et al., 2007; Hamlin & Wilson, 2004; Hoeffler & Keller, 2002; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006; Zdravkovic, Magnusson, & Stanley, 2010). In addition, the effect of the good fit between a brand and a cause are moderated or mediated by other factors such as brand awareness, attitude toward CSR

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and consumers' perceptions about the retailer's motive and the affinity for the social cause (Barone, Norman, & Miyazaki, 2007; Nan & Heo, 2007; Zdravkovic et al., 2010). On the other hand, the perceived fit can play a moderating role on CSR effectiveness (Bigné-Alcañiz et al., 2012; Chen, Su, & He, 2014). For example, Bigné-Alcañiz and colleagues (2012) found that consumers were more likely to associate a social cause with a brand only when the fit was perceived high due to the compatibility of brand and social cause.

### Cause-Consumer Factors

Additionally, studies that are related to the cause and consumer have been conducted. The factors include consumers' support for or attitude toward a particular social cause. Researchers have demonstrated that consumers' reaction to CSR varies depending on their support for and expectations of CSR (Mohr & Webb, 2005; Pérez & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013; Podnar & Golob, 2007; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Speed & Thompson, 2000). For example, Mohr and Webb (2005) provided evidence that the higher the consumer support for a CSR domain that a company targets (i.e., CSR support), the stronger the effect of CSR activities exert on corporate image and purchase intent among consumers. CSR support refers to "consumers' personal support of the domain of the company's CSR actions" (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001, p. 228). When consumers support a social cause that a company is involved in, they are more likely to identify with the company (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). These findings imply that consumer support for a company's CSR domain is a moderating factor in consumer evaluation of a company.

Unlike the dichotomous classification of CSR support into low vs. high in previous research, Pérez and Rodríguez del Bosque (2013) classified customers into four

groups based on their CSR support types: *low support, social orientation, individual benefit, and high support*. According to findings from Pérez and Rodríguez del Bosque (2013), those in the high support group tended to emphasize all kinds of social initiatives regardless of the beneficiaries of CSR (e.g., customers, shareholders, employees, and society), whereas those in the low support group were likely to score low in overall initiatives. Those in individual benefit cluster had a tendency to show a relatively high interest in individual benefits but not societal benefits. In contrast, those in the social orientation group showed a special interest in societal benefits. While previous research on CSR support put the focus on the level of CSR support (high vs. low), this classification seems is an extension of that by including a mixture of levels (high vs. low) and benefit orientation types (individual benefit vs. social benefit). Taking these four groups into consideration, Pérez and Rodríguez del Bosque (2013) found that CSR support played a moderating factor in perceptions of CSR activities such as CSR motivations, company credibility, and CSR image.

### Consumer-Company Factors

Yet another factor that pertains to CSR effectiveness involves how consumers perceive their relationship with a corporation. Psychological distance to a company is a factor that determines consumer responses to CSR activities. Psychological distance refers to "the lack of connection between a consumer and a company" (Kreilkamp, 1984; Lii, Wu, & Ding, p. 16; Trope, Liberman, & Wakslak, 2007). Research suggests that as consumers feel closer toward a company, that proximal psychological distance leads to more favorable consumer response (Lii el al., 2013). In addition, identification with a company is another factor that has been studied. The corporate-customer identification refers to "the degree of overlap in a consumer's self-concept and his or her perception of

the corporation" (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994; Lichtenstein, Drumwright, & Braig, 2004, p. 17). That is, the more consumers perceive that a company has traits similar to their own, the more likely consumers will identify with the company. Prior research shows that consumers with self-concepts similar to those of the corporation were likely to be more favorable in perceptual (e.g., loyalty or emotional attachment) and behavioral (e.g., purchase intention) responses to that corporation's CSR activity (Lichtenstein et al., 2004).

**CSR Challenges**

In keeping with the popularity of CSR, as discussed above, a myriad of research has been conducted that can be categorized as cause-, company-, and consumer-related factors. However, there remain four important issues that need to be examined in-depth to better understand CSR in today's environment. Those include the challenges of growing consumer skepticism toward CSR and consumer CSR weariness along with lack of long-term outcomes of CSR initiatives and new media channels for CSR communication.

**Consumer skepticism** about companies that engage in CSR is not a new concept. With the popularity of CSR, skepticism has actually risen (Bida, 2013; Elving & van Vuuren, 2011; McClimon, 2014). Skepticism can be defined broadly as "consumer distrust or disbelief of marketer actions" (Forehand & Grier, 2003, p. 350). Indeed, previous research has demonstrated the negative effect of consumer skepticism on CSR outcomes (Anderson, 1986; Baghi el al., 2009; Forehand & Grier, 2003; Kim & Lee, 2009; Menon & Kahn, 2003; Ross, Stutts, & Patterson, 2011; Varadarajan & Menon, 1988). The increasing consumer skepticism toward CSR initiatives was evidenced by a recent survey by Nielson (McAllister, 2016). About 43% of respondents identified CSR initiatives as increasing publicity possibilities for the companies rather than as serving the

public good. Sixteen percent of the respondents were neutral and only 43% perceived the companies' motives as acts of corporate social responsibility.

Greenwashing issues, raised in recent years, may be considered to be a factor that increases consumer skepticism toward CSR. Greenwashing refers to "the use of marketing or public relations practices to create a misleading impression of a company's environmental performance" (Elving & van Vuuren, 2011, p. 50). For instance, several automobile companies try to position their electric and hybrid cars as clean and green. However, a recent study revealed that those cars could produce as much pollutants as conventional vehicles (Wald, 2013). As another example of greenwashing, oil companies often portray natural gas as clean energy compared to actual renewable resources such as wind and solar, even though natural gas plants can produce only half as much carbon dioxide as coal-fired plants (Wald, 2013). Recently, a penalty of nearly $1 million was assessed against Walmart, the largest retailer in the U.S., due to its "greenwashing" claims (Johnson, 2017). In that case, Walmart sold plastic products that were wrongfully labeled as biodegradable or compostable. When consumers hear or read greenwashing news about a company, consumer skepticism toward specific CSR messages may be seriously increased. Furthermore, a series of such greenwashing cases may result in consumers' overall negative perceptions toward CSR activities in general.

Next, consumers' repeated exposure to CSR activities and a marketplace that is saturated with CSR activities may cause **CSR weariness** among consumers. Businesses have tried to communicate their commitment to social issues and communities via CSR activities. Lim, Sung, and Lee (2015) content analyzed the websites of Global Fortune 500 companies and found that 90% of those global companies presented information about their CSR engagement on their websites. In addition, various media such as TV,

newspapers, and books also inundate consumers with a constant stream of CSR-related news (e.g., Commbs & Holladay, 2012; Venkatesan, 2014; Visser, 2011).

Not surprisingly, constant reminders that companies are doing something good may lead to weariness among consumers – referred to as **CSR fatigue** (Crane & Matten, 2013). An over-saturation of too much good news about well-intentioned efforts may cause consumers to take CSR initiatives for granted, thereby reducing the novelty of marketing tool to differentiate one company from the rest. In particular, in terms of CRM campaigns, Berglind and Nakata (2005) suggest that companies should be cautious about consumers becoming tired of paying a premium to help others. That is, due to compassion fatigue, "a condition whereby donors become overwhelmed by requests for their charitable dollars" (p. 451), advantages that result from CRM may diminish over time.

Research on CSR weariness and/or fatigue is limited. Among the few studies, Sung and Lee (2015) explained the relationship between CSR novelty perception and consumer skepticism. Results showed that CSR activities were no longer considered to be novel. In addition, a negative correlation was found between CSR novelty perception and CSR skepticism. That is, those with a low level of CSR novelty perception tended to have higher skepticism toward CSR activities. Berlyne's (1970) two-factor model (wear-in and wear-out) and Sawyer's habituation-tedium theory (1981) explain the effects of ad repetition and familiarity on consumer response. In the wear-in phase (i.e., Sawyer's "habituation"), consumers become familiar with repeated ads, resulting in higher recall and positive attitude. However, in the wear-out phase (i.e., Sawyer's "tedium"), ad repetition leads to boredom and irritation, reducing ad effectiveness. Although these studies focused specifically on ad repetition, the logic underlying those effects may help shed light on how familiarity and boredom also influence the effectiveness of CSR.

Third, generally, previous research does not provide findings that explain the **long-term outcomes of CSR**. A successful CSR initiative expected to create and/or retain a good reputation of the company over time (Brønn & Vrioni, 2001), breed loyalty and commitment among consumers and employees (Mandhachitara & Poolthong, 2011; White, 2008), and build positive relationships with stakeholders and communities (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010). To date, most empirical studies have measured only the short-term effects of CSR, such as attitudes toward the initiative and purchase intention. However, positive attitude toward CSR and the higher purchase intention do not necessarily guarantee consumers' loyalty to companies that engage in CSR over the long haul (Andreasen, 1996). Therefore, the need exists to examine how CSR initiatives influence consumer satisfaction and loyalty in order to measure the sustainability of relationships with consumers, which is the ultimate objective of CSR.

Finally, the role of ever-evolving media technology needs to be understood as potential platforms to communicate and engage CSR involvement. **New digital media tools** can provide fresh and more flexible options for CSR initiatives and communication (Capriotti, 2014). Beyond the traditional one-way communication for dissemination of CSR-related information, new media platforms may facilitate conversations between corporations and consumers that will stimulate further consumer involvement in CSR activities. Thus, the use of interactive CSR through new media may strengthen consumer satisfaction with and loyalty to companies thereby leading to even more active consumer engagement in CSR initiatives. However, only scant studies on CSR from the perspective of new media effectiveness have been performed.

Morsing and Schultz (2006) suggested three CSR communication models based on types of stakeholder relationships: the stakeholder information strategy, the stakeholder response strategy, and the stakeholder involvement strategy. The first two

models are uni-directional and asymmetrical given that an organization controls the content and communication channels of its CSR messages. Those two strategies generally use advertising, the corporation's CSR annual report, and CSR brochures (Capriotti, 2014) to maintain consumer contact. In contrast, the stakeholder involvement strategy model is a dialogic, mutual, and interactive form of communication between a company and its stakeholders. Although little research has been conducted to determine which model serves the company better, Morsing and Schultz (2006) illustrated with a few cases that the stakeholder involvement strategy was a more promising vehicle to communicate with a company's target consumers. For example, Vodafone has started to include voices of consumers in its annual social reports. By inviting consumers to participate and to help co-construct CSR messages, Morsing and Schultz (2006) predicted that Vodafone would likely increase consumers' identification with the company.

Capriotti (2014) recommended that CSR communication should evolve from conventional information dissemination to conversations with stakeholders about CSR issues via new digital media. In other words, as CSR communication moves away from traditional information and response strategies toward a stakeholder involvement strategy, new communication channels such as the Internet/mobile and social media can provide a useful tool to support this proposition. However, although digital technology currently offers an interactive and multidirectional tool to communicate with stakeholders, companies have not yet exploited the full potential of new media technologies (Capriotti, 2014). Considering the benefits that new media can offer, it is time to advance innovative applications that incorporate new technology for CSR communication. In this way, corporations can establish dialogic communication with consumers and thereby facilitate consumer participation, collaboration, and engagement.

All four issues discussed above – increasing consumer skepticism toward CSR, CSR weariness, lack of long-term outcomes of CSR initiatives and new media channels for CSR communication – obviously require additional research. An examination of novelty and industry trends may provide guidelines to approach these issues. La Ferle et al. (2013) suggested that novelty might influence CSR evaluations. Specifically, Indian consumers who perceived a CRM campaign as more novel tended to rate it as more altruistic than American consumers who were more familiar with CRM marketing. Prior studies have also shown that message novelty was one of the factors that reduced ad wear-out (Berlyne, 1970; Tellis, 1997). These studies imply that a new and distinct approach to CSR, different from those used by competitors, may reduce CSR skepticism and fatigue. In addition, consumer engagement in CSR activities through capabilities offered by new media may also sustain long-term relationships.

Given that consumers rarely read CSR reports, Baker (2012) has suggested new ways to involve consumers in CSR activities, some already being carried out. For example, Unilever in the Netherlands started a new initiative, Treemagotchi, at Unilever, that has been renamed "Unilever Sustainable Living Plan (USLP) in Action" (Kairos Tools, 2014a). Treemagotchi is a game tool in which colleagues compete to get points by taking sustainable actions. A survey showed that as a result of participating in this program tool, employees felt well-informed about the company's sustainability strategy (40% before vs. 70% after playing the game) and identified more with the core values of the company (Karios Tools, 2014b). This case suggests that employee engagement may increase via the use of a game design based on interactive media tools and social networks (Gorman & Lammers, 2013). In a similar vein, consumer engagement through such tools may be on the horizon. For instance, Humana, a *Fortune 100* healthcare company, started its CSR programs by the use of gamification in the early 2000s.

Humana has encouraged their existing and potential consumers to keep in shape via game play campaigns. For example, the *Humana Horsepower Challenge* is a program designed for students in middle schools who are given pedometers to record their steps. Children who show the most physical activity earn rewards that they can use to customize their horse avatars. Students who participated in this program turned out to be six times more physically active than before starting the game. Moreover, new approaches have walked into even CSR reports. In 2016, Heineken released its 2015 CSR report via a two-minute video entitled, "*Let's Be Frank*." Featuring Dutch rapper and vocal artist, Kevin "Blaxtar" de Randamie, the video delivered Heineken's sustainability initiatives. In addition, Heineken USA launched an interactive online mini-game and shared it with its consumers. With this immersive channel, consumers can learn about what CSR-related progress and achievements that Heineken USA made throughout 2015 (DaSilva, 2016; Sustainable Brands, 2016). A series of these efforts of companies that invite consumers to engage in their CSR activities imply that CSR gamification can be expected to be a powerful as well as impactful mechanism to help overcome several challenges mentioned above and re-invigorate consumer engagement in CSR initiatives.

GAMIFICATION AND CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT

While getting consumers' attention and engagement is becoming difficult to achieve, gamification is regarded as an effective approach for attracting and engaging consumers, and even changing consumers' behaviors (Roth, 2012; Zichermann & Linder, 2013). Zicherman and Linder (2013) referred to gamification as "implementing design concepts from games, loyalty programs, and behavioral economics to drive user engagement" (Zichermann & Linder, 2013, p. xii). Deterding and his colleagues (2011) defined it as "the use of video game elements in non-game systems to improve user

experience and user engagement" (p. 1). An expert gamification company, Bunchball (2016), defined it as "integrating game mechanics into a website, an enterprise application, or an online community to motivate participation, engagement, and loyalty." These definitions share a commonality in that the goal of gamification is primarily for driving *engagement* with people.

The gamification approach has implemented through diverse areas that include education/tutorials (e.g., Khan Academy), health (e.g., HealthMonth), sustainability (e.g., Recyclebank), and task management (e.g., EpicWin) (Deterding, 2012). For example, Khan Academy (https://www.khanacademy.org), a non-profit educational organization that is supported by Google and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, provides a free online collection of materials and resources for a variety of curriculum, including computer programming, microeconomics, art/world history as well as arithmetic, physics, organic chemistry. While solving challenges that are assigned in games, members can be rewarded with points and/or achievement-badges and see their progress with infographics whenever they log in. Recyclebank (https://www.recyclebank.com/), a company that seeks eco-friendly initiatives, integrated gamification elements into its sustainable movement that motivates people to have an eco-conscious lifestyle. Whenever doing environmentally friendly actions such as recycling and saving energy, individuals can record their behaviors, compare theirs with others, and earn points. The monetary incentive is redeemed so that individuals can use it at shops such as Barnes & Noble, Preserve, and thredUP (Fox, 2012).

According to Gartner Inc. (2011), more than 70% of enterprises would adopt gamification by 2015, promoting 50% of all corporate innovation. The market of gamification is expected to reach $5,500 billion in 2018, three times the $1,707 billion in 2015 (Pappas, 2015). Gamification, one of the Top 10 Technology Trends for 2012 by

Deloitte (2012), is expected to elicit a desired outcome of engagement. Indeed, a number of leading corporations in various areas (e.g., entertainment, retail, media/publishing, education, healthcare/wellness) have already applied gamification to their marketing strategies (Peterson, 2012). For example, McDonald's launched the *Monopoly* game promotion to draw new consumers and increase overall purchase. This promotion has been going on for years, and is considered a successful and long-running gamified project to directly increase profits. In addition, Nike developed *Nike+*, a hardware and software solution based on a location-based technology. It requires a small sensor placed in *Nike+* runner and an app. When individuals with *Nike+* walk or run, they can measure the distance and pace of it and the calories they burn. Since *Nike+* users can share their records, they can also compete with each other. The game encourages consumers to experience the product with a lot more fun. Therefore, the gamification of marketing programs is not new. The ever-evolving media technology now has the potential to expand it further.

The trend to use gamification has also occurred in CSR communication. In addition to the cases of Humana, Unilever, and Heineken mentioned above, Aetna offers *Mindblooms*, an online game, that lets participants create a tree and as they perform wellness tasks such that leaves and other features can be added. Also, UnitedHealth group offers the *OptumizeMe* app that allows players to earn virtual rewards for their health efforts, working individually or as a group. Similarly, the app *Charity Miles* allows people to earn money or raise awareness for charities by walking, running or biking. These games can be termed "CSR games." Even though Zmuda and colleagues (2015) placed the emphasis on the context of business organization and employees, the study suggests a "CSR simulation game" as a useful tool for employees to obtain awareness, basic knowledge, competence, and in-depth understanding for CSR activities that a

company is involved in. Through this process, Zmuda et al. (2015) argues that employees become a change agent to integrate certain CSR practices into the business. This may hold true in terms of general consumers other than employees.

Literature on gamification and games should be helpful in our understanding of the ways to engage consumers in today's media-rich environment: what elements of game influence consumers' engagement, and what characteristics of consumers have an impact on game play. In addition, prior research on advergames should be particularly helpful since they have the ultimate goal of persuasion: brand awareness, consumer involvement, and behavioral response. Understanding how advertising works in games would be informative on how CSR communication works via gamification.

GAMIFICATION RESEARCH

As a result of the increasing popularity of gamification, research on this topic is also on the rise. Studies have illustrated that gamification is an effective tool to motivate people to perform desirable behaviors in various fields, such as education/learning and health (Deterding, 2012; de-Marcos, Domínguez, & Saenz-de-Navarrete, 2014; Gabarron et al., 2013; Glover, 2013; Huotari & Hamari, 2012; Muntean, 2011; Simões, Redondo, & Vilas, 2013). For instance, de-Marcos and colleagues compared gamification approach in an undergraduate course with traditional e-learning approach. Findings showed that academic performance was better and attitude toward the teaching tool was more positive in the gamification setting. In addition, Gabarron et al. (2013) examined the impact of a gamified web application on prevention of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Findings showed that gamification elements such as avatars and achievement-based gifts resulted in encouraging users to learn more about sexual health and STDs. In similar line with this, Murphy and colleagues (2013) revealed that a cervical cancer-related film with

a narrative versus one with a non-narrative elicited greater health-related knowledge, more favorable attitude, and higher behavioral intention to test the disease.

However, empirical research on how gamification works is still limited, particularly in the marketing context that might provide insights for CSR activities (Amir & Ralph, 2014; Deterding, 2011; Hamari, Koivisto & Sarsa, 2014; Seaborn & Fels, 2015). Indeed, Hamari and colleagues (2014) examined empirical studies on gamification in details. They performed a focused search with criteria such as peer-reviewed full paper published in an international venue, explicit research methods, and papers including empirical study. With only a total of 24 studies that were found, it was revealed that the most common context where gamification was implemented was education and learning. In contrast, gamification research in the marketing context has been rarely conducted although gamification has been touted as a promising marketing strategy (Hamari et al., 2014). Therefore, the current research turns to research on games and advergames that may be helpful for understanding what game factors are effective for engaging consumers and how consumers process CSR initiatives within the game play mechanism.

**Factors Influencing Game Play**

Video game play continues to steadily rise yet is typically considered the exclusive property of the younger generation, even though a significant number of people of all ages enjoy games (Lenhart, Jones, & Macgill, 2008). In 2016, the average game player in the U.S. was about 35 years old, and the time spent playing online games was 6.5 hours a week, according to the Entertainment Software Association (2016). Of the total time spent gaming, mobile gaming accounted for 17% in 2016 vs. 10% in 2008 (Statista, 2017). These figures demonstrate that games are reaching more than just the

young people and that time spent on gaming is going up, particularly due to mobile devices.

A CSR game is fundamentally a channel available for a company to communicate its CSR initiate to and engage with consumer. For the purpose of better understanding that process, the current research therefore explores within a conceptual framework the factors of game play that correspond to the three key elements of CSR: cause, company, and consumer. The factors of game play include game narratives, product placement in the game, and player characteristics. Specifically, since a CSR game is intended to promote a cause, the reasons why a company chooses the cause and how the company seeks to advance that cause are oftentimes explained to consumers through game narratives. Without that contextual background, the goal for game players simply falls into moving toward the next level of competency. Moreover, since a company aims to use the CSR game as a channel to communicate its CSR activities, the game also needs to include information related to the company, such as a company logo to enhance players' perception of the company's role. Other characteristics, such as players' support for the CSR cause being promoted will also likely influence how they respond to the game and the company.

### Game Content

***Content Type***. A great deal of previous research has been directed toward studying the impact of types of game content, in particular, the influence of violent game play among children and young people. The General Aggression Model (GAM), proposed by Anderson and colleagues (Anderson, 1997; Anderson, Anderson, & Deuser, 1996; Anderson & Bushman, 2002; Anderson & Dill, 2000), states that exposure to violent media also has an influence on individuals' internal state (cognitive, affective, and

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arousal) and these internal states, in turn, have an impact individuals' perception and interpretation of events. Through this process, violence-related association is found to evoke and thus lead to subsequent aggressive and antisocial behavior (Anderson & Dill, 2000; Anderson & Ford, 1986; Bartholow & Anderson, 2002; Bartholow, Bushman, & Sestir, 2006).

Compared to studies on violent video games, research that examines the effects of playing prosocial video games is still in its early stages (Greitemeyer, Osswald, & Brauer, 2010). In this context, the term prosocial games refer to games that support positive values for society, such as education, healthcare, and social causes as well as fun and entertainment. Expanding on the GAM, Buckley and Anderson (2006) suggested the General Learning Model (GLM). While the GAM addresses only violent media content, the GLM emphasizes the importance of the overall content of video games: for example, exposure to antisocial video games is found to increase aggression-related tendencies whereas prosocial video games are assumed to increase prosocial tendencies (Gentile et al., 2009; Greitemeyer & Osswald, 2010; 2011). Research conducted under the GLM has found that through prosocial games, players are able to understand a particular perspective and/or adopt certain prosocial behaviors (Ross & Tomlinson, 2010). As a result of playing prosocial video games, socially positive cognitions, affect, and behavior increase (Gentile et al., 2009; Greitemeyer & Osswald, 2010) while aggressive cognitions such as hostility and anti-social thoughts decrease (Greitemeyer & Osswald, 2009).

Furthermore, the effects of game content on players' responses appear to transfer to evaluations of brands presented as part of the games. Waiguny and his colleagues (2013) examined the influence of game content on brand attitudes by using two types of existing advergames: those with negative-laden combat vs. those with neutral racing. By definition, an advergame is a game "designed and created to promote a brand, product,

service, or idea" (Terlutter & Capella, 2013). Results have shown that advergames that featured negative content led to less favorable attitude toward the game compared to content that was neutral. From the perspective of affect transfer and associative-propositional evaluation (APE) model, negative associations from violent content are likely to be linked to, or spill over onto, brands featured in the games (McCarty & Lowrey, 2012; Russell, 2002; Thomson, 2010).

In the context of CSR, companies design CSR initiatives for the purpose of engaging consumers to join the companies in "doing good" for the benefit of the community. Given this goal, CSR activities typically involve prosocial actions, such as charitable donations and fundraising, volunteering, and partnership with nonprofit organizations. In that sense, CSR games typically include positive content. The GLM suggests that prosocial games evoke positive tendencies, leading to favorable cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes. Furthermore, affect transfer together with the APE model suggests that the positive associations from games are likely to spill over to ads and/or brands featured in the games. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that those who play a CSR game may make prosocial associations when playing the CSR game and those associations spill over to brands embedded in the game.

*Game Narratives*. Given that companies aim to communicate their CSR activities through CSR games, most of those games tend to include narratives that explain how the CSR initiative works and its goal. According to Salen and Zimmerman (2004), game narratives can be classified into two types: embedded vs. emergent narratives. Embedded narrative is defined as "pre-generated narrative content that exists prior to the player's interaction with the game…to provide motivation for the events and actions of the game" (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004, p. 383). In contrast, emergent narrative means a story that emerges from the players' interaction with the game system. While embedded narrative is

usually provided as a background for the game, emergent narrative is changed moment by moment depending on players' actions (Whitehead, 2007).

There are several definitions of game narratives. According to Schneider et al. (2004), game narrative is described as "a storyline and a justification for the actions taken during the game." Dansky (2007) defined it as "the methods by which the story materials are demonstrated to the audience" (p. 1). In a similar vein, Qin, Rau, and Salvendy (2009) referred to narratives as "the methods or styles used to tell the story of the game" (p. 110). Based on Salen and Zimmerman's classification (2004), Schneider et al. (2004) focuses on a perspective of embedded narrative. On the other hand, given that Dansky (2007) and Qin et al. (2009) see game narrative as an interactive co-creation of a fixed game story and players' performance, they appear to take viewpoint of emergent narrative.

Previous research on game narratives, in general, has found that narratives tend to influence the game play experience. For example, Schneider and his colleagues (2004) examined how narratives in violent video games changed the game play experience. The presence/absence of narratives were manipulated with killing enemies to "save the world" (the presence of a narrative) vs. "getting to the next level" (the absence of a narrative). Findings showed that the presence of a narrative led to greater identification with the characters, a sense of presence, and physiological arousal. As Laurel (2013) predicted, having a story seemed to make players feel part of a game that adds to their overall experience. However, findings from Schneider et al. (2004) are limited to violent games. In addition, they were existing games so that variables that might influence game play outcomes could not be controlled. Yee, Duh, and Quek (2010) investigated how the presence of narratives impacted play experience with a casual game (e.g., mobile card game). Although their study was conducted with seniors, aged 55 – 82, results found that

players exposed to a game with embedded narratives scored higher in enjoyment than those exposed to a game without narratives.

In other disciplines, such as education and brand communication, narratives have also been proven effective to obtain desired outcomes (Adaval & Wyer, 1998; Escalas, 2004; Giannakos et al., 2012). For example, Giannakos and colleagues (2012) examined the effect of video games based on storytelling on mathematic skills improvement among secondary school students. A total of 12 students were provided a game where they tried to solve math problems to rescue a kidnapped dog, Lucky. They were asked to play this game for two weeks. Findings demonstrated that mathematics performance improved for students given a story for the game compared to those who simply played the game without a story. In addition, for brand communication, Adaval and Wyer (1998) found that individuals exposed to travel brochures with narratives showed more favorable evaluations than individuals exposed to brochures with bulleted lists of travel details. In addition, Escalas (2004) demonstrated that storyboard ads with narratives not only led to a higher level of self-brand connections but also resulted in more positive attitude toward the brand and purchase intention, compared to ads without narratives.

Not only does it have a positive impact on increasing engagement and enjoyment, but narratives are also found to overcome resistance against persuasion messages (Moyer-Gusé, 2008; Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010; Slater & Rouner, 2002). For example, Moyer-Gusé and Nabi (2010) examined the effect of narratives in entertainment-education programs on learning performance. An experiment with undergraduates showed that a dramatic narrative program about the difficult consequences of an unplanned teen pregnancy reduced reactance by decreasing perceptions of persuasive intent, compared to a non-narrative program. The lower reactance led to higher intention on safe sexual behavior.

The extended elaboration likelihood model (E-ELM) provides a useful theoretical background for understanding this narrative persuasion process (Moyer-Gusé, 2008; Slater & Rouner, 2002). The E-ELM posits that elements such as engagement with a storyline (or, transportation) and identification with characters in the storyline reduce message scrutiny and counterarguments, and enhance persuasion outcomes (Green & Brock, 2000; Slater & Rouner, 2002). In particular, several empirical studies demonstrate that transportation, "a convergent process, where all mental systems and capacities become focused on events occurring in the narrative" (Green & Brock, 2000, p. 701), is negatively related to counterarguing. For instance, Green and Brock (2000) showed that transported individuals into a written narrative were likely to have story-consistent beliefs. Slater, Rouner, and Long (2006) also revealed that a dramatic television program with narratives was effective to exert viewers' attitudinal change.

Brehm (1966) suggests psychological reactance as resistance that may arise in the persuasion process. Psychological reactance theory argues that individuals have a need for the freedom to choose their attitudes and behaviors (Brehm & Brehm, 1981). When their freedom is threatened and/or decreased, individuals will be motivated to regain independence and in turn psychological reactance, a form of arousal, occurs. Given that persuasive communication is likely considered as a threat to the freedom, there is a chance that psychological reactance arises. Findings from Moyer-Gusé and Nabi (2010) confirmed that entertainment messages with narratives served as relatively subtle persuasion communication, leading to less psychological reactance. That is, people seem to become immersive in a story, which reduces people's awareness of the persuasion intent of messages.

Previous research reveals that narratives in games encourage players to become more immersed and involved, implying that the effect of a CSR game may also vary

depending on narratives. A game without a CSR narrative may achieve the basic goal of game playing (e.g., to obtain a high score to move to the next level) as in general games. On the other hand, a game that includes a CSR narrative usually introduces a social cause that a company is involved in, thereby giving players a meaningful reason to play the game (e.g., to save the environment). Also, drawing on research about game content type and narratives, games that include CSR narratives are assumed to be more likely to encourage players to access prosocial thoughts/affect and become more engaged in playing the game, which in turn, may exert more positive effects on game/company evaluations.

*Player Characteristics*

Previous studies also demonstrate that a player's characteristics such as motivations, personalities, and demographics can influence game responses (e.g., Griffiths, Davies, & Chappell, 2004; Jeng & Teng, 2008; Yee, 2006). For example, based on the five-factor model of personality, Jeng and Teng (2008) demonstrated how the five personalities (openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) are related to motivations to play games. As mentioned above, CSR games may involve prosocial actions to make society a better place. Thus, personalities with high levels of agreeableness that tend to be cooperative, considerate, and willing to help others (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Saucier, 1994) are more likely to participate in CSR games in order to achieve a prosocial goal.

Given that CSR games differ from general games, player factors related to social causes are important to consider. As noted previously, **CSR support** is one of the most pivotal factors that influences CSR effectiveness (Mohr & Webb, 2005; Pérez & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013; Podnar & Golob, 2007; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Speed

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& Thompson, 2000). Moreover, those with high CSR support are more likely to identify with a company and show favorable perceptions of CSR activities than those with low CSR support (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Pérez & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013). Thus, it is assumed that players' support for a CSR initiative moderates their responses to the game and the company represented in the game.

*Executional Element: Product Placement Types in Games*

In essence, a CSR initiative can be viewed as a branding activity and CSR games may be used to advance that activity. Given this, while playing games, players are repeatedly exposed to information associated with company brands. It could be through either as main elements of the game (e.g., cars in a racing game) or in the background (e.g., billboards). The literature on product placement suggests that branding effectiveness may differ depending on how brands are displayed and what roles those brands play in games. Thus, for designing a CSR game, it is needed to understand how best to present brands in games and how the placement influences brand effectiveness from the players' perspective.

Advertising avoidance is a practice with which consumers are well-acquainted, thanks to developments in technology. Therefore, marketers constantly seek ways to draw consumer attention through alternative strategies to product placement. Unlike traditional advertising, brand messages embedded in product placement are integrated into entertainment media such as movies, television shows and games, thereby blurring boundaries between advertising, entertainment, and information (Raney et al., 2003).

Product placement can be classified into several types by the extent to which products are recognizable to consumers. For example, Gupta and Lord (1998) categorized product placement by two criteria: modes (or modality) and prominence. Modes are

divided into three: visual only (VIS), audio only (AUD), and combined audio-visual (AV). VIS is to provide a visual brand identifier such as product logo without sounds and brand-relevant messages. AUD is to mention a brand/product name or brand-related messages via a character without the product's visual form. AV is a combined version of VIS and AUD, showing a brand and mentioning the brand name or brand-related message at the same time. Overall, research results suggest that AUD placement tended to score higher recall than VIS placement. Also, although the difference was not statistically significant, AV placement showed higher recall over VIS placement. The findings suggest that, in terms of product placement modes, auditory information may be more intrusive and prominent to obtain attention (Posner, Nissen, & Klein, 1976; Russell, 2002).

The prominence of product placement is classified into two types: prominent vs. subtle placements. Brands in prominent placement tend to be highly visible in regard to size or position for a relatively long time, whereas brands with subtle placement tend to be out of the main focus for a short time. Gupta and Lord's findings (1998) showed that recall of prominent placement was higher than that for subtle placement. These findings were demonstrated in other research (Brennan, Dubas, & Babin, 1999; Lee & Faber, 2007; Nelson, 2002; Schneider & Cornwell, 2005). For instance, Brennan, Dubas, and Babin (1999) demonstrated that an on-set brand placement where brands were endorsed by a main character or placed in a major position in a scene (or, prominent placement) was more effective in terms of brand recognition than creative brand placement where brands are placed in the background or a peripheral scene (or, subtle placement). Also, Schneider and Cornwell (2005) confirmed that computer game players experienced higher recall and recognition of prominent banners in contrast to subtle placement. In

addition, Lee and Faber (2007) found that focal (more prominent) placement resulted in higher brand memory than peripheral (more subtle) placement.

Compared to other media such as TV and movies, the prominence of brands is more important in the context of games. Because of actively interacting with a game and being immersive in that behavior, players may find it more difficult to notice and remember brands embedded in a game (Lee & Faber, 2007). According to the limited-capacity model of attention (Kahneman, 1973), an individual's attentional capacity to process all activities and/or information is limited. The capacity can be divided into two parts: capacity for primary tasks and spare capacity for secondary tasks and other environments (Kahneman, 1973; Lynch & Srull, 1982). The primary task for game players is to play a game so that processing brand information in the game tends to become the secondary task (Grigorovici & Constantin, 2004). This implies that the attentional capacity of players is more committed to game play compared to brands embedded in the game (Lee & Faber, 2007). Given this, prominent placement may lead to greater brand memory versus subtle placement since brands in prominent placement are located in the center of the action where players' attention is focused, which leads to salience effect (Lynch & Srull, 1982). Subtle placement where brands are set outside of the main visual area in a game likely results in relatively lower brand memory. Previous empirical studies provide evidence for this explanation (Lee & Faber, 2007; Schneider & Cornwell, 2005)

Even though brand awareness – recall and recognition – is generally used to measure effectiveness of product placement, attitude is another important measure that may lead to positive consumer behaviors (Ajzen, 1985; Ajzen & Fishbien, 1977; 1980). However, there are relatively few studies that explored the impact of product placement on attitudinal outcomes (Matthes, Schemer, & Wirth, 2007). Unlike the positive effects of

prominent placement on recall and recognition, findings show that prominent placement can have a negative impact on brand attitude under certain circumstances (Cowley & Barron, 2008; Homer, 2009). For instance, Homer (2009) examined the impact of ad prominence and repetition on brand attitude in the context of television and movies. Findings showed that viewers exposed to prominent placement repeatedly revealed negative attitudes toward the brand, whereas those exposed to subtle placement showed relatively positive attitudes. In a similar vein, Cowley and Barron (2008) demonstrated that prominent placement had a negative effect on brand attitudes for TV viewers, particularly those who had a high level of program liking. In contrast, those with a low level of program liking showed positive attitudes toward the brands.

Such findings can be explained by psychological reactance theory (Brehm, 1966; Brehm & Brehm, 1981) that was discussed earlier for the understanding of narrative persuasion effect. Several studies show that the salience of persuasion information tends to lead to negative response by arousing reactance against the intrusive persuasion attempt. For example, Edwards, Li, and Lee (2002) examined the impact of pop-up ads on viewer response. Findings showed that pop-up ads (i.e., ads that interrupt content pages) were perceived as more intrusive than other ads (i.e., ads displayed between breaks in content pages, ads displayed upon closing a browser). The perception of intrusiveness may be considered as threats to viewers' freedom, thus eliciting psychological reactance. In turn, the psychological discomfort found to lead to greater feelings of irritation and ad avoidance. In the same vein, prominent placement may more activate awareness of salient and deliberate persuasion attempts than subtle placement (Peters & Leshner, 2013; van Reijmersdal, 2009), which can be perceived as a loss of freedom and result in psychological defenses.

Similarly, Cowley and Barron (2008) focused on persuasion knowledge model (PKM) to explain the findings that the impact of product placement depends on recipients' characteristics. According to PKM, suggested by Friestad and Wright (1994), individuals actively analyze, interpret, and evaluate marketers' persuasion tactics. To cope the persuasion attempts, individuals develop persuasion knowledge – beliefs about marketers' motives, strategies and tactics. When consumers perceive a message as a marketers' tactic (i.e., a high level of persuasion knowledge), their psychological reactance starts to prevent them from experiencing persuasion, which presumably exerts an influence on decreasing the message effectiveness. The main purpose of product placement is to convey brand-related information unobtrusively by inserting it in entertainment programs (e.g., movies, TV shows, games) in order to prevent recipients from activating their persuasion knowledge. Cowley and Barron (2008) suggest that the persuasion knowledge varies by recipients' characteristics. Specifically, those with higher program liking tend to have greater persuasion knowledge than those with lower program liking. Viewers who are higher in program liking are more likely reliant on a program to meet their entertainment goals and thus are more attentive while watching TV. Therefore, those with higher program liking are more likely to be aware of prominent placement and perceive it more intrusive, irritating and distracting compared to those with lower program liking. Consistent with their postulation, findings of Cowley and Barron (2008) showed that the negative effect of prominent placement was greater for those with higher program liking than those with lower program liking.

On the other hand, applying product placement to games, Chen and Ringel (2001) suggested three types of product placement in games: **associative, illustrative, and demonstrative**. Associative placement is to set a brand/product in the background in games. Illustrative placement is to put a brand/product in prominent feature in games.

Demonstrative placement is to present a brand/product in a game's natural context, leading consumers to experience and interact with the brand/product. Compared to Gupta and Lord's (1998) categorization, associative placement appears to be subtle placement, while illustrative and demonstrative placements are prominent placement. Nelson's preliminary study (2002) shows that when a brand was a major part in a game, it resulted in more involvement of players, and increased recall (e.g., in terms of motor brands, car selection in a racing game). Nelson's findings suggest that illustrative and demonstrative placements are likely to enhance brand recall.

Interestingly, Yang and Wang (2008) argued that product placement in games is different from general product placements given that games are mission-oriented media. Thus, Yang and Wang (2008) suggested three key components of game product placement: **goal, feedback, and operator** that help players complete their missions. They further explored the effect of these three types of game product placement. A goal is an objective that players should achieve (e.g., a Big Mac is given after completing a game). Feedback constitutes reinforcements such as a reward and punishment that players receive via their game play (e.g., a Big Mac is provided when a player clicks a correct target). Operator is an instrument that helps players achieve their goal (e.g., a Big Mac is fed to give energy to a player's character). Their research results showed that different product placements led to different outcome, specifically on attention. The most effective game product placement form was operator, followed by feedback, and goal. However, Yang and Wang (2008) only focused on mission-oriented characteristics of games. Based on the previous classifications of Gupta and Load (1998) and Chen and Ringel (2001), Yang and Wang's (2008) three types of product placement – goal, feedback, and operator, seem to fall under prominent placement. That is, their classification does not cover subtle (or, associative) placement in games.

Overall, the effectiveness of product placement is based on how well a product/brand is recognizable and noticeable to consumers. While previous studies indicate that prominent product placement generally leads to high recognition/recall compared to subtle product placement, in terms of attitude, prominent placement may result in negative brand attitude depending on ad execution factors (e.g., repetition) or recipients' factors (e.g., program liking, program involvement).

These findings suggest that responses to an ad/brand in a CSR game may also vary based on how the ad/brand is displayed. Considering that CSR initiatives tend to be executed at the corporate level, an ad/brand in a CSR game is likely to be that of the company. Therefore, players exposed to a company logo in a prominent placement may show higher recall/recognition than players exposed to a logo in a subtle placement. Conversely, players exposed to a company logo in a prominent placement may have a more negative attitude toward the company brand than players exposed to the logo in a subtle placement. Additionally, the impact of product placement may vary depending on players' characteristics such as support for the CSR initiative.

## Chapter 3:   An Integrated Framework and Research Hypotheses

The primary purpose of this dissertation research is to understand how CSR gamification works and what factors need to be considered when implementing the approach. Gamification has been used as an effective tool to engage individuals and elicit desired behaviors in a variety of sectors including education/learning, health, marketing (e.g., Nike+, McDonald's Monopoly), and CSR communication (e.g., Humana, Unilever, Double A, Heineken). In particular, the CSR gamification approach is being viewed as a way to overcome challenges that CSR communication faces, including CSR skepticism and consumer weariness. Despite growing interest in gamification, scant research has been conducted to examine the effectiveness of CSR gamification. Therefore, the current research has reviewed a wide range of literature on CSR and games, and suggests factors that are important for understanding the efficacy of CSR gamification.

Based on three key elements (cause, company, and consumer) in CSR, corresponding factors have been identified from the game-related literature. Those include game content types (e.g., Greitemeyer el al., 2010; Waiguny et al., 2013), game narratives (e.g., Giannakos et al., 2012; Schneider et al., 2004), players' characteristics (e.g., Jeng & Teng, 2008; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001), and product placement in games (e.g., Homer, 2009; Schneider & Cornwell, 2005). Drawing from previous research findings, this research proposes a theoretical framework for CSR gamification that integrates the key constructs of game content type, game narratives, players' characteristics, and product placement in games (See Figure 2). Since CSR games generally tend to feature positive content, the first factor of game content type is excluded from the proposed framework. Further, given that CSR initiatives tend to be executed at

the corporate level, this research hereafter uses the term company placement instead of product placement.
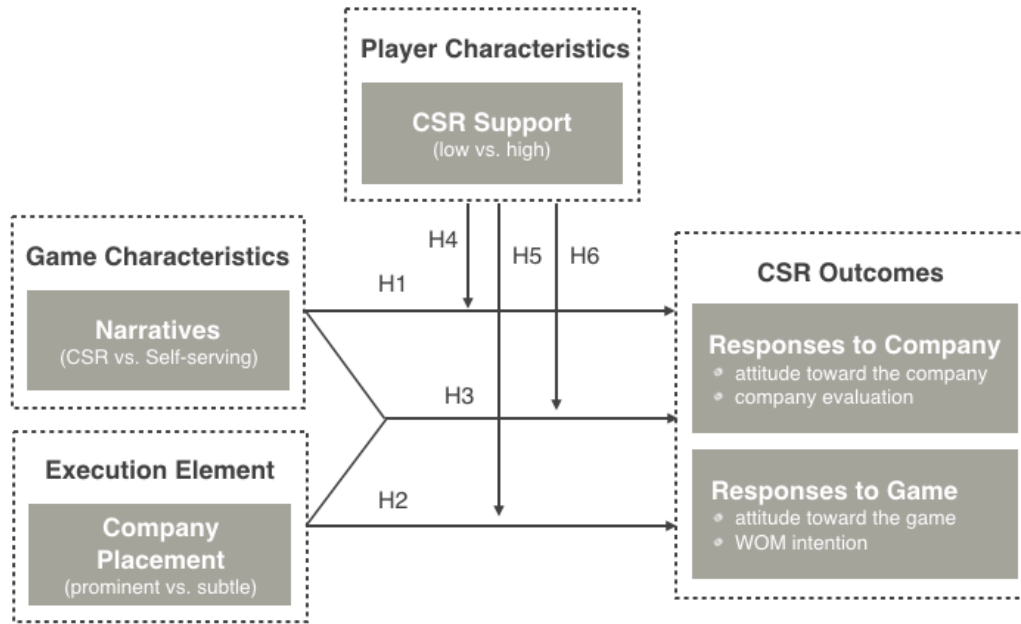


Figure 2:     Integrated Framework

**CSR NARRATIVES AND RESPONSES TO GAME/COMPANY**

The goal of companies in the use of CSR games is to increase consumer acknowledgement, favorable attitude, and/or participation in the companies' CSR initiatives. Therefore, CSR games need to include CSR narratives in games. Previous studies indicate a significant impact of narratives on individual cognition and affect (Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2011; Niederdeppe, Shapiro, & Porticella, 2011; Oliver et al., 2012; Shin, Lee, & Lee, 2003). For example, Shin, Lee, and Lee (2003) compared ads with narratives in contrast to ads without narratives (i.e., ads with only images and information). Findings revealed that ads with narratives produced greater ad recall, liking, and purchase intention.

The positive impact of narratives holds true also in the context of game play. Game narratives are found to influence the players' game experience by motivating individuals to become more immersed and involved. Studies show that game narratives lead to positive game play outcomes including greater identification with characters, presence, arousal, and enjoyment (Schneider et al., 2004; Yee, Duh, & Quek, 2010), and produce desired behaviors such as higher learning skills (Giannakos et al., 2012).

In particular, Schneider et al. (2004) demonstrated the impact of narratives on the motivational, psychological, and physiological experience of game players. Focusing on violent games, in a narrative-based game, subjects were asked to experience violent actions (i.e., killing) to save the world, whereas in a non-narrative-based game, subjects were asked to play the game to get to the next level. Results showed that compared to players of a non-narrative-based game, those of a narrative-based game were likely to have greater identification with their characters and goals, sense of presence, and arousal. In a similar vein, Yee and colleagues (2010) examine the impact of narratives with a casual game and found that a game with narratives led to more enjoyment compared to a game without narratives. These findings imply that narratives provide a reasonable and acceptable justification to play a game and thus produce a more interactive and immersive game experience.

As discussed earlier, a narrative in CSR games is needed to communicate to players the company's CSR initiative. Therefore, this dissertation examines the impact of CSR narratives on consumer response to a game and a company associated with the game. Based on research by Schneider and his colleagues (2004), the presence of a CSR narrative may be manipulated to encourage players to "participate in a CSR initiative" (with a CSR narrative). In contrast, the goal of general games that lack a CSR narrative merely encourages players to "obtain as high as scores or points and get to the next

level." Considering that the earning of scores or points rewards only players themselves, this research uses the terminology "self-serving narrative" instead of a game "without a CSR narrative." Drawing from studies on game narratives, a CSR game narrative is likely to provide players with justification for playing the game, thereby engaging players to benefit the CSR cause. Player engagement, in turn, may result in a more favorable response to the game and the company embedded in the game. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed.

> **H1**: Subjects who play a game with a CSR narrative will show (a) more positive attitude toward the game, (b) higher WOM intention toward the game, (c) more favorable attitude toward the company, and (d) more favorable company evaluation compared to those who play the game with a self-serving narrative.

## COMPANY PLACEMENT IN A GAME AND RESPONSES TO GAME/COMPANY

Given that CSR games function as a type of branding communication, companies may display company logos in CSR games so that players are repeatedly exposed to the logos and therefore are more aware of the companies' CSR initiatives, leading to a favorable company evaluation. Therefore, as an execution element of company logos, this dissertation research explores the impact of product placement in games.

Studies on product placement show that the effects of exposure differ based on how a brand is displayed and what role the brand plays in the game (Brennan et al., 1999; Schneider & Cornwell, 2005). In particular, the limited-capacity model of attention (Kahneman, 1973) provides a useful theoretical framework to understand the cognitive impact of product placement in games. The theory suggests that individuals' cognitive

capacity that is allocated to an object or task is limited. Therefore, individuals tend to devote their capacity to primary tasks and assign spare capacity for secondary tasks. In the context of a game, the primary task is to play the game and to leave for the spare capacity other peripheral elements, including brand-related messages as well as surroundings (i.e., background, elements out of visual and action focus). Based on the concept of limited spare capacity, the salience of brand exposure in the center of game play (i.e., prominent placement) may be expected to produce greater brand memory (e.g., recall, recognition) given that players are likely to process the brand message along with their primary task (i.e., game play). As evidence of the explanation above, previous empirical findings suggest that prominent placement (or, on-set placement) lead to greater recognition/recall than subtle placement (or, creative placement).

Even though brand memorability is important given its association with future purchase behavior, cognitive responses such as recall and recognition are neutral in themselves, neither positive nor negative (Bigné-Alcañiz et al., 2012). Given that the ultimate purpose of CSR games is to engage consumers in CSR initiatives that a company is involved in and elicit consumers' favorable evaluation toward the company, this research focused on attitudinal and behavioral responses. However, empirical research on product placement is limited regarding attitudinal and behavioral outcomes in the context of game play. Therefore, research from other media contexts is relied upon to provide insights into consumer response.

Compared to recognition/recall, previous studies suggest that prominent placement may result in a boomerang effect (Cowley & Barron, 2008; Homer, 2009). For example, Homer (2009) investigated the effect of ad prominence and repetition on brand attitudes in television shows and movies. Results found that when ads are repeatedly presented, those in prominent placement lead to more negative attitudes toward the brand

than ads in subtle placements. According to the psychological reactance theory (Brehm & Brehm, 1981), deliberate persuasion and coercion that reduce individuals' freedom tend to trigger individuals' psychological discomfort and cognitive defenses against the attempts. As a result, prominent placement may create counter arguments that lead to negative attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. Based on that line of research, the effects of a prominently placed company logo in a game may be less effective than a subtly placed logo. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed.

> **H2**: Subjects exposed to a prominently-placed company logo in a game will have (a) less positive attitudes toward the game, (b) lower WOM intention toward the game, (c) less favorable attitude toward the company, and (d) less favorable company evaluation than those exposed to a subtly-placed company logo.

Another consideration examined in this dissertation research looks at whether the presence of CSR narratives may help reduce reactance toward persuasive intention (Moyer-Gusé, 2008; Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010). Prior studies have demonstrated that a narrative serves to reduce psychological reactance against persuasion intention. In keeping with the extended elaboration likelihood model (E-ELM), Moyer-Gusé and Nabi (2010) revealed that narratives in entertainment-education programs helped individuals to become more immersive and engaged with content (Green & Brock, 2000) and, in turn, exposed them to a persuasion message more naturally. The unobtrusiveness of the message likely reduced psychological discomfort and counterarguments against the persuasion attempt (Brehm, 1966; Brehm & Brehm, 1981), which in a CSR game may lead to a more favorable consumer response.

As discussed earlier, a CSR narrative is expected to produce greater game engagement for players compared to a self-serving narrative. Subsequently, it can also be assumed that the CSR narrative versus the self-serving narrative may result in less psychological reactance toward a persuasion message such as brand-related information. This implies that the negative effect of prominent placement may vary by game narratives. Specifically, players exposed to a game with a CSR narrative may show less psychological reactance when they see a prominently placed company than those exposed to a game with a self-serving narrative. In turn, the relatively lower psychological reactance may lead to a less negative outcome with regard to the game and the company. Therefore, an interaction between the narratives and company placement will occur. Based on that logic, the following hypothesis is put forth:

**H3**: The negative effect of prominent placement in a game will be lower in subjects who play a game with a CSR narrative than in those who play a game with a self-serving narrative in terms of (a) attitude toward the game, (b) WOM intention toward the game, (c) attitude toward the company, and (d) company evaluation.

**CSR SUPPORT FOR A SOCIAL CAUSE AND RESPONSES TO GAME/COMPANY**

Previous research has shown that consumers' responses to CSR activities may depend on their level of support for the CSR initiative (Mohr & Webb, 2005; Pérez & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013; Podnar & Golob, 2007). CSR support can be defined as the extent to which consumers personally support the domain of a company's CSR initiative (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). Specifically, individuals with higher support for a domain

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related to a company's CSR initiative tended to have more positive reactions (e.g., corporate image, purchase intention) and identify more strongly with the company than individuals with lower support (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001).

Given that CSR games (i.e., games with a CSR narrative) usually support social causes and in that way differ from general games (i.e., games with a self-serving narrative), CSR support may moderate consumer response to CSR games. In that sense, there may be an interaction effect between CSR support and narratives. Specifically, higher support for a social cause may evoke a stronger identification with a company that targets the same or a similar cause. Thus, the positive impact of a CSR narrative can enhance the engagement for players with high CSR support compared to those with low CSR support. In contrast, for a game condition with a self-serving narrative where there is no CSR-related information, it is expected that no difference will be found between high CSR support and low CSR support.

**H4**: In a CSR-narrative game condition, the positive effect of CSR narratives in a game will be greater in subjects with a high level of CSR support than in those with a low level of CSR support, whereas in a self-serving-narrative game condition, there will be no difference by level of CSR support.

In addition, there may be an interaction effect between CSR support and company placement. Previous studies have shown that the impact of product placement varies by recipients' characteristics such as a level of program liking and program involvement (Cowley & Barron, 2008; Matthes et al., 2007). For example, Cowley and Barron (2008) observed that prominent placement in TV ads had a negative influence on brand attitudes

for those with high program liking, whereas it had a positive effect for those with low program liking.

Even though concepts of program liking and involvement are not exactly the same as CSR support, the variables are similar in terms of leading to individual media engagement where product placement is embedded. As a result, it may be generally assumed that CSR support may moderate the effect of company placement. Specifically, players with high CSR support for a social cause are expected to be more attentive because they are more willing to participate in the social cause. As a result of increased attention, a high CSR-support group, compared to a low-CSR-support group, may more sensitively realize that a company logo is placed in a game to influence their evaluations about the company. Drawing upon observations of persuasion knowledge model (Friestad & Wright, 1995), players with high CSR support are more likely to have greater persuasion knowledge than those with low CSR support. Furthermore, given that prominent placement may be accompanied by more psychological reactance (Brehm, 1966; Brehm & Brehm, 1981) against a persuasion message in a game (e.g., company logo), the negative effect of prominent placement will be greater for a high-CSR-support group compared to a low-CSR-support group.

**H5**: The negative effect of prominent placement in a game will be greater in subjects with a high level of CSR support than in those with a low level of CSR support.

Given the moderating effects of CSR support with narratives and company placement, a further assumption is that a three-way interaction may occur among narratives, company placement, and CSR support. More specifically, since those with

high CSR support are more involved in a social cause and attentive to a CSR game, a prominently placed company logo in the game may have a negative effect on players' responses since the brand-related message (i.e., company logo) may be perceived to be more intrusive and irritating and produce higher psychological reactance against the persuasion intent. On the other hand, a CSR narrative may also lead to greater game engagement and likely reduce psychological reactance that results from prominent placement. Therefore, the negative effect of prominent placement may be decreased among players exposed to a game with a CSR narrative than among those exposed to the game with a self-serving narrative. Conversely, players with low CSR support are not likely to pay enough attention to a game to process CSR-related (i.e., CSR narrative) and brand-related (i.e., company placement) information. Therefore, the interaction between narratives and company placement may not be found for players with low CSR support. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed.

> **H6**: There is a three-way interaction effect of narrative, company placement, and CSR support on (a) attitude toward the game, (b) WOM intention toward the game, (c) attitude toward the company, and (d) company evaluation.

In sum, the current research examines how game narratives and company placement influence consumer response, specifically in terms of attitude toward the game, WOM intention toward the game, attitude toward the company, and company evaluation. In addition, this dissertation proposes that the impact of narratives and company placement will vary by CSR support for a social cause that a company is involved in. The hypotheses set forth in this dissertation research are shown in Table 1.

| **The Effect of Narratives** |
| :--- |
| H1: Subjects who play a game with a CSR narrative will show (a) more positive attitude toward the game, (b) higher WOM intention toward the game, (c) more favorable attitude toward the company, and (d) more favorable company evaluation compared to those who play the game with a self-serving narrative. |
| **The Effect of Company Placement** |
| H2: Subjects exposed to a prominently-placed company logo in a game will have (a) less positive attitudes toward the game, (b) lower WOM intention toward the game, (c) less favorable attitude toward the company, and (d) less favorable company evaluation than those exposed to a subtly-placed company logo. |
| **The Interaction between Narratives and Company Placement** |
| H3: The negative effect of prominent placement in a game will decrease in subjects who play a game with a CSR narrative than in those who play a game with a self-serving narrative in terms of (a) attitude toward the game, (b) WOM intention toward the game, (c) attitude toward the company, and (d) company evaluation. |
| **The Moderating Effect of CSR Support for Narratives** |
| H4: In a CSR-narrative game condition, the positive effect of CSR narratives in a game will be greater in subjects with a high level of CSR support than in those with a low level of CSR support, whereas in a self-serving-narrative game condition, there will be no difference by level of CSR support. |
| **The Moderating Effect of CSR Support for Company Placement** |
| H5: The negative effect of prominent placement in a game will be greater in subjects with a high level of CSR support than in those with a low level of CSR support. |
| **The Moderating Effect of CSR Support for Narratives × Company Placement** |
| H6: There is a three-way interaction effect of narrative, company placement and CSR support on (a) attitude toward the game, (b) WOM intention toward the game, (c) attitude toward the company, and (d) company evaluation. |

Table 1:    Summary of Hypotheses

# Chapter 4:   Method

This dissertation research examined the effect of narratives and company placement on consumer response to a CSR game and investigated the moderating role of CSR support. To test the proposed hypotheses, a series of pretests and a main study were performed. In this chapter, an overview of the research design, stimuli development, sampling, data collection procedure, and measurements of key constructs are addressed.

## OVERVIEW

A 2 (narratives: CSR vs. self-serving) × 2 (company placement: prominent vs. subtle) × 2 (CSR support: high vs. low) between-subjects experimental design was employed. Narratives and company placement were manipulated, while CSR support was measured. For manipulation of narratives, participants were exposed to a game either with a CSR narrative or with a self-serving narrative. For manipulation of company placement, participants were assigned to a game either with a prominent or a subtle company placement.

## SAMPLING

A group of undergraduate students were recruited in this research. Compared to other age groups, Millennials (21-34) are considered to be more responsive to issues of sustainability and social activism (Cone Communications, 2015; Nason, 2016; Nielson, 2014). According to a study by Cone Communications (2015), Millennials would be more likely to switch brands to one associated with a cause (91% vs. 85% U.S. average), purchase a product that includes a social/environmental benefit (87% vs. 83% U.S. average), tell friends and family about CSR efforts (82% vs. 72% U.S. average), and volunteer for a cause that a company they trust or support (74% vs. 56% U.S. average). Furthermore, a company's socially responsible commitments served as an important

criterion to decide where to work for a majority of Millennials (76% vs. 58% U.S. average; Cone Communications, 2016). These statistics show that Millennials are a significant target group as well as potential employees for companies that are involved in CSR initiatives.

In addition, it is considered important to communicate CSR information through compelling content, visual storytelling, and interactive experiences to reach Millennials (Cone Communications, 2015). Specifically, Millennials prefer CSR content that is entertaining and engaging through media such as videos (36% vs. 29% U.S. average, infographics (26% vs. 16% U.S. average), and games (15% vs. 8% U.S. average). Therefore, the sampling from college students is expected to provide significant insights into the efficacy of CSR gamification.

**STIMULI DEVELOPMENT**

**The Cause**

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, nearly 16 million children under 18 the U.S. live in households where they are unable to consistently access enough nutritious food necessary for a healthy life (Frohlich, 2014). Therefore, U.S. Hunger Relief was selected as a CSR initiative in this research. Based on Davis and Blomstrom (1975) and Brown and Dacin (1997), this dissertation research broadly defines CSR as a series of prosocial actions and/or commitment of a company to enhance social welfare at large and the interest of the company. Given this, a CSR initiative that was used in this research was to donate a certain amount of money for U.S. Hunger Relief depending on players' participation in a CSR game.

**The Company**

According to USA Today (2015), *Feeding America* is the largest hunger relief charity and network of food banks in the U.S. Their partners include a variety of food retailing companies and a few financial/IT companies (e.g., Walmart, Kroger, Target, Sam's Club, Morgan Stanley, Nestle, Kraft, Kellogg's, HSBC, HEB, Google, Costco, Campbell's, Bank of America). Therefore, the food retailing industry was selected as a product category in this research. Indeed, CSR activities in the retailing section has been widely discussed and the focus of public concern and media attention (Chkanikova & Mont, 2015; Wagner, Bicen, & Hall, 2008).

Literature suggests that consumer-company factors such as identification with a company and psychological distance that consumers feel toward a company influence consumer response to CSR initiatives (Lichtenstein et al., 2004; Lii et al., 2013). Therefore, to eliminate confounding associations that participants might have with a real company, a fictitious company, *Food Dynamics*, was created through Business Name Generator (https://www.shopify.com/tools/business-name-generator).

**The Game**

A mobile-web based game was professionally developed for actual use. During the game play, players grow fruits/vegetables by watering and fertilizing them, and treating the plants with disease control. Each player can pick one of four fruits/vegetables: strawberry, orange, tomato, and cabbage. To grow each fruit/vegetable, players made three stages. While growing their fruits/vegetables, players were exposed to a company logo on a billboard.

The game was modified to manipulate two factors: narratives and company placement. As shown in Table 2, a total of four versions of the game were developed. All versions were identical except for narratives and company placement.

| Condition | Narratives | Company Placement |
|:---:|:---:|:---:|
| 1 | CSR narrative | Prominent |
| 2 | CSR narrative | Subtle |
| 3 | Self-serving narrative | Prominent |
| 4 | Self-serving narrative | Subtle |

Table 2:   Four Experimental Conditions

**Game Narratives**

Emergent narrative is a post-structured storyline that takes shape via players' game play and is thus difficult to be controlled by game designers (i.e., companies that develop CSR games). Therefore, the current research focuses on a perspective of embedded narrative, a preprogrammed storyline that is set into the game prior to players' interaction with the game. Specifically, adopted from Schneider et al. (2004) and revised, this current research defined narratives as "the purpose of a game for which an individual needs to play."

Given the definition, the CSR narrative was manipulated by instructing subjects that they were growing fruits/vegetables to contribute to a CSR initiative of Food Dynamics that would benefit hungry children in America. For the self-serving narrative, subjects were asked to play the game without being told the purpose of their participation in a social cause. Those in the second group were merely asked to earn points for the player's Farm Bank and reach a high score. Narratives were provided to players before they started to their fruits/vegetables.

A pre-test was conducted to test if the manipulation goal was secured. A total of 69 participants were recruited from a southwestern university in the U.S. Subjects were randomly provided with one of two narrative screenshots (a CSR narrative vs. a self-

serving narrative). After exposed to the narrative for at least 20 seconds, subjects were asked to choose the purpose of playing the game among five options. The options included: "to grow fruits and vegetables for children's hunger relief," "to grow fruits and vegetables to earn points for your Farm Bank and reach a high score," "to grow fruits and vegetables to have fun and escape boredom," "not sure," and "don't know." Chi-square analysis showed that subjects were successfully manipulated ($X^2(3) = 45.45, p < .001$). The two narratives are shown in detail in Appendix A.

| Narratives | For hunger relief[a] | For a high score[b] | For fun[c] | Not sure | Don't know | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CSR | 29 (85.3%) | 4 (11.8%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (2.9%) | 0 (0%) | 34 (100%) |
| Self-serving | 2 (5.7%) | 29 (82.9%) | 3 (8.6%) | 1 (2.9%) | 0 (0%) | 35 (100%) |
| Total | 31 (44.9%) | 33 (47.8%) | 3 (4.3%) | 2 (2.9%) | 0 (0%) | 69 (100%) |

[a] to grow fruits and vegetables for children's hunger relief
[b] to grow fruits and vegetables to earn points for your Farm Bank and reach a high score
[c] to grow fruits and vegetable to have fund and escape boredom
$\chi^2 = 45.45, df = 3, p < .001$

Table 3: Manipulation Check for Narratives (Pretest)

In addition to narratives that were given before game play, related elements were provided while playing game. In a CSR-narrative game, upon growing one fruit/vegetable, the following pop-up message was provided: "Congratulation! You successfully grew your own (fruit/vegetable). $10 will be donated by Food Dynamics." Then, the fruit/vegetable was moved to the right side and the amount of donation by Food Dynamics was added as shown in Figure 3.
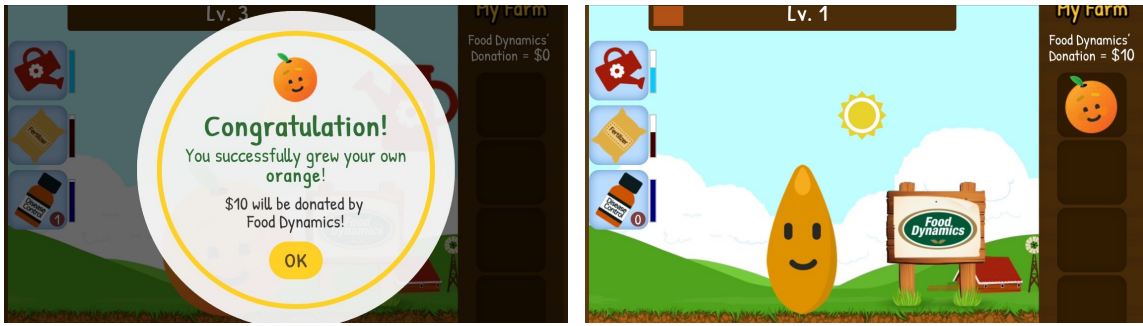
Figure 3:     Elements for CSR Narrative

In a self-serving-narrative game, once growing one fruit/vegetable, a pop-up message was given as follows: "Congratulation! You successfully grew your own (fruit/vegetable). 10 points will be deposited into your Farm Bank!" Then, as shown in Figure 4, the fruit/vegetable was moved to the right side and 10 points was added in players' Farm Bank.



Figure 4:     Elements for Self-serving Narrative

**Company Placement**

Based on previous studies on product placement (Brennan et al., 1999; Cowley & Barron, 2008; Gupta & Lord, 1998; Lee & Faber, 2007), this research defined company placement as to embed company-related messages/symbols in game elements. Adopting from Lee and Faber (2007), prominent company placement was referred to as a company

logo that appears in the center of the action in a game. Subtle company placement was defined as a company logo that appears in peripheral fields. Given this, for the prominent placement, a logo of Food Dynamics was placed near fruits/vegetables that the players were growing, whereas for the subtle placement, the logo was positioned far away in the background.

To check the company placement manipulation, two stimuli for prominent placement and two stimuli for subtle placement were created. For prominent placement, while one stimulus had a billboard with a company logo positioned on the right side of fruits/vegetables that players were growing, the other had the billboard on the upper side of fruits/vegetables. For subtle placement, one stimulus positioned a company logo in a billboard on the mountains in the background, whereas the other had the logo on the roof of a house in the background. A total of 89 participants were recruited from a southwestern university in the U.S. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of the four company placements (two prominent and two subtle placements). Company placement was measured with three items on a 7-point semantic differential scale (Brennan et al., 1999; Lee & Faber, 2007; Schneider & Cornwell, 2005): In the game, Food Dynamics, the name of the company, was placed _____ (1 = subtly, off to the side, in the background, 7 = prominently, in the center of the action, in a major position in a scene; Cronbach's $\alpha$ = .91). The higher the score was, the more the placement was prominent. Among four company placements (two prominent and two subtle placements), the placement with the highest score (i.e., the greatest prominent placement) and the placement with the lowest score (i.e., the greatest subtle placement) were selected. As presented in Table 4, a T-test revealed that the difference between the two company placements (prominent vs. subtle) was significant ($M_{pro}$ = 4.65 vs. $M_{sub}$ = 2.51; $t$ (40) =

4.51, $p < .001$). Therefore, company placement was securely manipulated. The final stimuli for company placement were shown in Figure 5.

| Company Placement[a] | N | Mean | Standard Deviation | $t$ ($df$) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Prominent | 21 | 4.65 | 1.63 | 4.51 (40) *** |
| Subtle | 21 | 2.51 | 1.44 | |

[a] Company placement was measured on a 7-point scale; Higher scores represent prominent placement
*** $p < .001$

Table 4:    Manipulation Checks for Company Placement (Pretest)



Figure 5:    Prominent vs. Subtle Company Placement

**RECRUITMENT OF SUBJECTS AND STUDY PROCEDURE**

A total of 194 students from a southwestern university in the U.S. were recruited to participate in this research. Subjects were given a link to begin playing a game via their mobile phone. The link randomly assigned to subjects one of the four stimuli conditions: 1) CSR narrative and prominent placement, 2) CSR narrative and subtle placement, 3) self-serving narrative and prominent placement, and 4) self-serving narrative and subtle placement. After signing up for the game, participants were given a brief and general description of the study and asked to sign a consent form before playing the game. Once they gave consent, a game narrative was given to read for 10 seconds.

Participants then received a basic game tutorial that explained how to grow fruits/vegetables. Upon understanding how to play the game, participants were asked to pick one of four fruits/vegetables (strawberry, orange, tomato, and cabbage) and to grow it by watering, fertilizing, and treating it with disease control.

It took about 5 minutes to complete growing one fruit/vegetable. Once finishing growing it, players were asked if they would like either to grow another fruit/vegetable or to finish the game and be redirected to a questionnaire to complete a survey. Participants were allowed to grow up to four fruits/vegetables. After growing all four fruits/vegetables, participants were automatically redirected to a questionnaire.

In the questionnaire, subjects were asked to answer questions measuring game-related outcomes (attitudes toward the game, WOM intention toward the game), company-related outcomes (attitude toward the company, company evaluation), and manipulation-check measures. Subsequently, subjects were also queried about CSR support and demographic information. In terms of CSR support, given that a CSR initiative that Food Dynamics was involved in was to donate certain amount money for children's hunger relief, support for philanthropy was measured. Participants were also asked questions about several other CSR domains including environment and employees to prevent sensitivity about CSR support for philanthropy.

In addition, given that perceived fit between a company and a social cause can influence CSR outcomes (Bigné-Alcañiz et al., 2012; Chen, Su, & He, 2014), the fit was measured as a potential covariate. Furthermore, to confirm the positive effect of CSR narratives on CSR effectiveness through increasing players' engagement (Schneider et al., 2004; Yee et al., 2010), game engagement was assessed. Lastly, subjects were asked about their demographic information (e.g., gender, age, ethnicity, income) and were thanked for their participation. Overall, the experiment took approximately 20-25 minutes

to complete for players who grew at least one fruit/vegetable. Upon completion of the survey, each subject was given course credits for participation. Appendix B provides the overall procedure that describes how players grew fruits/vegetables in the game.

**MEASUREMENT**

**Dependent Variables**

*Attitude toward the Game*

As one of the game-related outcomes, subjects were asked about feelings that they had toward the game they'd just played. Adopted from Nan and Heo (2007), three 7-point semantic differential items (1 = dislike, negative, unfavorable, 7 = like, positive favorable) were used to measure attitude toward the game (Cronbach's $\alpha$ = .95).

*Intention to WOM toward the Game*

Another game-related outcome was intention to WOM toward the game. Subjects were asked about how likely they would like to spread the game information via WOM. Specifically, three 7-point semantic differential scale items from Skarmeas and Leonidou (2013) were assessed: "I will _____ this game to people I know (talk up/talk down)," "I will bring up this game in a _____ way in conversations I have with friends and acquaintances (negative/positive), "I often will speak _____ about this game in social situations (unfavorably/favorably)" (Cronbach's $\alpha$ = .89).

*Attitude toward the Company*

Similar to the game-related outcomes, attitude toward the company was measured as a company-related outcome. Adopted from Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, and Hill (2006), three 7-point semantic differential items (1 = negative, bad, unfavorable, 7 = positive, good, favorable) were measured to examine how subjects felt about the company, Food Dynamics (Cronbach's $\alpha$ = .98).

*Company Evaluation*

The last company-related outcome was company evaluation. To examine what subjects think about the company, Food Dynamics, seven 7-point semantic differential items, adopted from Forehand and Grier (2003), were used: 1 = bad, unhelpful, unlikable, insincere, untrustworthy, not at all involved in community, doesn't care about customers, 7 = good, helpful, likable, sincere, trustworthy, very involved in community, cares very much about customers (Cronbach's $\alpha$ = .94).

**Moderator**

*CSR Support*

Participants were asked to indicate their support for the environment, philanthropy, and employees. Adopted from Mohr and Webb (2002) and Pérez and Rodríguez del Bosque (2015), for support for environment, three items were asked on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = do not support at all, 7 = strongly support). The statements included: "companies should make every effort to reduce the pollution from their factories," "companies should use recycled materials in manufacturing new products," and "companies should have factory programs to conserve water and energy" (Cronbach's $\alpha$ = .90). For support for philanthropy, three statements were: "companies should regularly make donations to charity," "companies should have programs to recognize programs to recognize employees for their volunteer work in the community," "companies should donate some of their products to people in need" (Cronbach's $\alpha$ = .87). For support for employees, five items included: "companies should pay fair salaries to employees," "companies should offer safety at work to employees," "companies should treat employees fairly (without discrimination or abuse)," "companies should offer training and career opportunities to employees," "companies should offer a

pleasant work environment (e.g., flexible hours, conciliation)" (Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$). Even though participants were asked about CSR support for three domains (environment, philanthropy, employees) to prevent sensitivity to CSR support for a specific domain, only CSR support for philanthropy was used in the analysis for the reason that the CSR initiative used in this research was to donate a certain amount of money for U.S. Hunger Relief.

**Additional Measures**

*Fit between the Company and the Cause*

As discussed earlier, fit between the company and the cause was measured as a potential covariate. Adopted from Speed and Thompson (2000), fit between the company and the cause was measured on a 7-point scale with five items (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree): "There is a logical connection between Food Dynamics and its donation to hungry children," "The image of Food Dynamics and the image of its donation to hungry children are similar," "Food Dynamics and donations to hungry children fit together well," "Food Dynamics and donations to hungry children stand for similar things," "It makes sense to me that Food Dynamics make donations to hungry children." (Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$)

*Game Engagement*

Game engagement was additionally measured to identify the effect of narratives on consumer outcomes. Adopted from Charlton and Danforth (2007), eight items on a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) were asked to measure game engagement: "I feel happy at the thought of playing this game," "I would hate to go without playing this game for more than a few days," "When I see this game, I feel drawn toward it," "I tend to want to spend increasing amounts of time playing this game," "It is

important to me to be good at this game," "I often experience a buzz of excitement while playing this game," "I like the challenge that learning to play this game presents," "I try to make my play sessions last as long as possible." (Cronbach's $\alpha$ = .86).

**Demographic Information**

Finally, participants' basic demographic information was asked. The items included gender, age, ethnicity, and overall income in 2015.

**Analysis Methods**

Data analyses were performed with the SPSS 24.0 statistical package. First, reliability tests were conducted to confirm measurements. As shown in Table 5, reliability for all measurements was acceptable ranging from .86 to .98. To analyze descriptive statistics of overall variables, frequency tests were conducted. For manipulation checks, a chi-square test and an independent samples t-test were used. Finally, a series of MANOVA/ANOVA/ANCOVA were performed to test suggested hypotheses.

| Measurement | Number of Items | Cronbach's $\alpha$ |
|---|:---:|:---:|
| Attitude toward the Game | 3 | .95 |
| WOM Intention toward the Game | 3 | .89 |
| Attitude toward the Company | 3 | .98 |
| Company Evaluation | 7 | .94 |
| CSR Support | | |
| Environment | 3 | .90 |
| Philanthropy | 3 | .87 |
| Employees | 5 | .91 |
| Fit between the Company and the Cause | 5 | .91 |
| Game Engagement | 8 | .86 |

Table 5:   Scale Reliability

# Chapter 5:   Analysis and Results

**MANIPULATION CHECKS**

Manipulation checks for narratives and company placement were conducted. The same measurements as those in the pretests were used. As shown in Table 6, a chi-square test showed that narratives were successfully manipulated ($\mathcal{X}^2(4) = 81.17$, $p < .001$). Also, an independent samples t-test revealed that company placement (Cronbach's $\alpha$ = .80) was successfully manipulated: $M_{pro} = 3.61$ vs. $M_{sub} = 2.93$, $t\,(192) = 3.66$, $p < .05$ (See Table 7). After excluding data indicating that manipulation for narratives was not secured, a total of 131 participant responses were used in the final analysis.

| Narratives | For hunger relief[a] | For a high score[b] | For fun[c] | Not sure | Don't know | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CSR | 84 (77.8%) | 10 (9.3%) | 5 (4.6%) | 8 (7.4%) | 1 (.9%) | 108 (100%) |
| Self-serving | 12 (14.0%) | 47 (54.6%) | 12 (14.0%) | 10 (11.6%) | 5 (5.8%) | 86 (100%) |
| Total | 96 | 57 | 17 | 18 | 6 | 194 |

[a] to grow fruits and vegetables for children's hunger relief
[b] to grow fruits and vegetables to earn points for your Farm Bank and reach a high score
[c] to grow fruits and vegetable to have fund and escape boredom
$\chi^2 = 81.17$, $df = 4$, $p < .001$

Table 6:   Manipulation Checks for Narratives

| Company Placement[a] | N | Mean | Standard Deviation | t (df) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Prominent | 83 | 3.61 | 1.28 | 3.66 (192)*** |
| Subtle | 111 | 2.93 | 1.27 | |

[a] Company placement was measured on a 7-point scale; Higher scores represent prominent placement
*** $p < .001$

Table 7:   Manipulation Checks for Company Placement

As presented in Table 8, among 131 participants, 74% (n = 97) of participants were female and 26% (n =34) were male. The average age was 20.08 ranging from 18 to 31. In terms of ethnicity, almost 60% (n = 76) participants were White, followed by Hispanic/Latino 18% (n = 24), Asian/Pacific Islander 16% (n = 21), African American 4.6% (n = 6), and Others 3.1% (n = 4). Regarding income, about 24% (n = 31) of participants preferred not to say. Income distribution for the others was as follows: less than $20,000 17.6% (n = 23), $20,000-$39,999 5.3% (n = 7), $40,000-$59,999 3.8% (n = 5), $60,000-$79,999 4.6% (n = 6), $80,000-$99,000 8.4% (n =11), $100,000 or more 37% (n = 48).

| Characteristics | Category | Frequency (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 34 (26.0) |
| | Female | 97 (74.0) |
| Age | Mean = 20.08 (range 18 – 31) | |
| Ethnicity | White | 76 (58.0) |
| | Hispanic/Latino origin | 24 (18.3) |
| | African American | 6 (4.6) |
| | Asian/Pacific Islander | 21 (16.0) |
| | Others | 4 (3.1) |
| Household Income | Less than $20,000 | 23 (17.6) |
| | $20,000 - $39,999 | 7 (5.3) |
| | $40,000 - $59,999 | 5 (3.8) |
| | $60,000 - $79,999 | 6 (4.6) |
| | $80,000 - $99,999 | 11(8.4) |
| | $100,000 or more | 48 (36.6) |
| | Prefer not to say | 31 (23.7) |
| | Total | 131 (100) |

Table 8:   Sample Characteristics

In this research, narratives (CSR narrative vs. self-serving narrative) and company placement (prominent vs. subtle) were manipulated and randomly assigned to participants. As presented in Table 9, among 131 participants, while 64.12% (n = 84) played a game with a CSR narrative, 35.88% (n = 47) played a game with a self-serving narrative. Regarding company placement, 48.85% (n = 64) were exposed to a company logo in prominent placement, whereas 51.15% (n = 67) were assigned to a company logo in subtle placement.

| Variable | Category | Frequency (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Narratives | CSR narrative | 84 (64.12) |
| | Self-serving narrative | 47 (35.88) |
| Company placement | Prominent | 64 (48.85) |
| | Subtle | 67 (51.15) |
| | Total | 131 (100) |

Table 9:    Random Assignment of Stimuli

**DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS**

Table 10 shows the overall descriptive statistics. Considering all measurements were used 7-point scale, it was notably found that three types of CSR support had a high level of means (*M*) and relatively small standard deviations (*SD*): support for environment $M = 6.33$, $SD = .93$; support for philanthropy $M = 6.03$, $SD = 1.08$; support for employee $M = 6.54$, $SD = .84$. Additional analyses were performed to investigate distribution of the three variables using skewness (*SK*) and kurtosis (*KU*). Given that in a normal distribution, skewness equals to 0 and kurtosis equals to 3 (Curran & West, 1996), findings showed that CSR support for three domains was negatively skewed and had kurtosis over 3, implying that the distribution strayed from normal: support for

environment $SK = -2.09$, $KU = 7.31$; support for philanthropy $SK = -1.47$, $KU = 3.29$; support for employee $SK = -3.41$, $KU = 16.09$.

| Variable[a] | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|
| Attitude toward the Game | 4.33 | 1.57 |
| WOM Intention toward the Game | 4.09 | 1.32 |
| Attitude toward the Company | 5.17 | 1.37 |
| Company Evaluation | 5.26 | 1.13 |
| CSR Support | | |
| Environment | 6.33 | .93 |
| Philanthropy | 6.03 | 1.08 |
| Employees | 6.54 | .84 |
| Fit between the Company and the Cause | 5.77 | 1.10 |
| Game Engagement | 2.36 | 1.03 |

[a] All variables were measured on a 7-point scale; Higher scores represent higher levels of each construct.

Table 10:   Descriptive Statistics

**HYPOTHESIS TESTING**

Independent variables in this research were narratives and company placement, whereas dependent variables were attitude toward the game, WOM intention toward the game, attitude toward the company and company evaluation. Given more than one dependent variable, a multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) planned to be conducted for the initial analysis. However, since Box M, one of the assumptions for MANOVA and/or MANCOVA tests, was not satisfied ($p > .05$; Hair et al., 1998). Therefore, this research chose a series of analysis of variance (ANOVA) for data analysis.

Previous studies suggest perceived fit between the company and the cause moderates consumer responses to CSR activities (Bigné-Alcañiz et al., 2012; Chen et al.,

2014). Therefore, before testing the suggested hypotheses, the impact of fit between the company and the cause on dependent variables was examined. Findings showed that the fit influenced WOM intention toward the game ($R^2_{adj.} = .03$, $F (1, 129) = 4.75$, $p < .05$; B = .24, $\beta = .19$, $t (129) = 2.18$, $p < .05$), attitude toward the company ($R^2_{adj.} = .03$, $F (1, 129) = 4.62$, $p < .05$; B = .25, $\beta = .19$, $t (129) = .2.15$, $p < .05$), and company evaluation ($R^2_{adj.} = .06$, $F (1, 129) = 9.92$, $p < .01$; B = .29, $\beta = .27$, $t (129) = .3.15$, $p < .01$). Therefore, the fit between the company and the cause was used as a covariate in terms of those three dependent variables – WOM intention toward the game, attitude toward the company, and company evaluation, in further analysis.

To examine the effects of narratives and company placement (H1 and H2) and interaction of the two variables (H3) on multiple dependent variables, a series of two-way ANOVA and ANCOVA were conducted.

**The Impact of Narratives on CSR Outcomes**

H1 posited the impact of narratives on CSR outcomes. More specifically, a game with a CSR narrative was expected to result in more positive attitude toward the game (H1a), higher WOM intention toward the game (H1b), more favorable attitude toward the company (H1c), and more positive company evaluation (H1d) than a game with a self-serving narrative. While ANOVA test was conducted for attitude toward the game, a series of ANCOVA with the fit between the company and the cause as a covariate was examined for the rest of dependent variables.

Results revealed a significant impact of the fit, as a covariate, for attitude toward the company ($F (1, 126) = 4.23$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .03$) and company evaluation ($F (1, 126) = 10.39$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .08$), whereas there was not an effect of fit for WOM intention

toward the game ($F$ (1, 126) = 1.68, $p$ > .05, $\eta^2$ = .01). These findings were applied to the following analyses for H2 and H3.

As shown in Table 11, a main effect of narratives for all CSR outcomes was found for all dependent variables: attitude toward the game ($F_{attG}$ (1, 127) = 11.06, $p$ < .01, $\eta^2$ = .08); WOM intention toward the game $F_{WOM}$ (1, 127) = 11.06, $p$ < .01, $\eta^2$ = .08); attitude toward the company $F_{attC}$ (1, 127) = 11.06, $p$ < .01, $\eta^2$ = .08; company evaluation $F_{Ceva}$ (1, 127) = 11.06, $p$ < .01, $\eta^2$ = .08). Specifically, as presented in Figure 6, participants who were exposed to a CSR narrative had a more favorable attitude toward the game, higher WOM intention, more positive attitude toward the company and company evaluation ($M_{attG}$ = 4.65, $M_{WOM}$ = 4.40, $M_{attC}$ = 5.62, $M_{Ceva}$ = 5.65) than participants who were exposed to a self-serving narrative ($M_{attG}$ = 3.76, $M_{WOM}$ = 3.55, $M_{attC}$ = 4.36, $M_{Ceva}$ = 4.55). Hence, H1a, H1b, H1c, and H1d were all supported.

| | Attitude toward the Game | | WOM intention toward the Game | | Attitude toward the Company | | Company Evaluation | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | MS | Fᵃ | MS | Fᵇ | MS | Fᶜ | MS | Fᶜ |
| Fit | - | - | 2.53 | 1.68 | 5.85 | 4.23* | 9.15 | 10.39** |
| Narratives (NA) | 24.59 | 11.06** | 17.82 | 11.84** | 34.55 | 25.00*** | 24.09 | 27.36*** |
| Company placement (CP) | 1.29 | .58 | 2.06 | 1.37 | .02 | .02 | .14 | .16 |
| NA × CP | 9.03 | 4.06* | 6.23 | 4.14* | 14.53 | 10.52** | 6.98 | 7.93** |

[a] $df$ = (1, 127), [b] $df$ = (1, 126)
* $p$ < .05, ** $p$ < .01, *** $p$ < .001

Table 11: Summary of two-way ANOVA/ANCOVA (Narratives × Company placement)
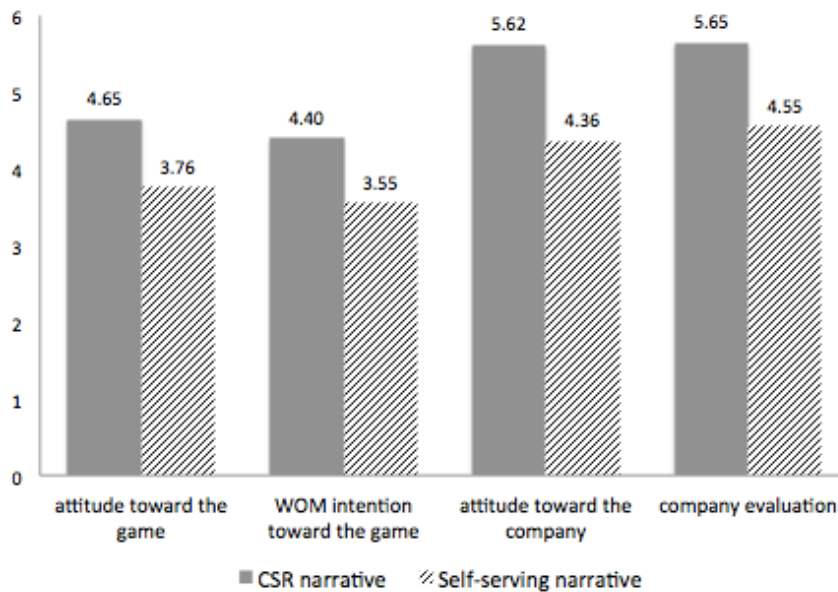
Figure 6:     The Impacts of Narratives on CSR Outcomes

**The Impact of Company Placement on CSR Outcomes**

H2 posited the effect of company placement on CSR outcomes. Specifically, a company logo in prominent placement was predicted to lead to more positive attitude toward the game (H2a), higher WOM intention toward the game (H2b), more favorable attitude toward the company (H2c), and more positive company evaluation (H2d) than a logo in subtle placement. As the same with analyses for H1, ANOVA test was conducted for attitude toward the game, whereas a series of ANCOVA with the fit between the company and the cause as a covariate was examined for the other three dependent variables.

Results revealed differences between participants exposed to prominent placement ($M_{attG} = 4.45$, $M_{WOM} = 4.23$, $M_{attC} = 5.20$, $M_{Ceva} = 5.23$) and subtle placement ($M_{attG} = 4.22$, $M_{WOM} = 3.96$, $M_{attC} = 5.13$, $M_{Ceva} = 5.29$). Except for company evaluation, prominent placement led to a slightly more favorable attitude toward the game, higher

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WOM intention toward the game, and attitude toward the company, compared to subtle placement. However, all differences were not statistically significant. That is, there was no main effect of company placement in terms of attitude toward the game, WOM intention toward the game, attitude toward the company and company evaluation ($p$ > .05). Therefore, H2a, H2b, H3c, and H2d were not supported.

**The Interaction of Narratives and Company Placement on CSR Outcomes**

H3 predicted the interaction effect between narratives and company placement on CSR outcomes. Specifically, the negative effect of prominent placement in a game expected to diminish in a game with a CSR narrative, compared to a game with a self-serving narrative, for attitude toward the game (H3a), WOM intention toward the game (H3b), attitude toward the company (H3c), and company evaluation (H3d).

As shown in Table 11, results from ANOVA and a series of ANCOVA tests showed a significant interaction effect between narratives and company placement for all dependent variables: attitude toward the game $F_{attG}$ (1, 127) = 4.06, $p$ < .05, $\eta^2$ = .03; WOM intention toward the game $F_{WOM}$ (1, 126) = 4.14, $p$ < .05, $\eta^2$ = .03; attitude toward the company $F_{attC}$ (1, 126) = 10.52, $p$ < .01, $\eta^2$ = .08; company evaluation $F_{Ceva}$ (1, 126) = 7.93, $p$ < .01, $\eta^2$ = .06. Detailed results for each CSR outcome are as follows.

*Attitude toward the Game*

For a game with a CSR narrative, participants exposed to a company logo in prominent placement ($M$ = 5.09) showed more favorable attitude toward the game than the logo in subtle placement ($M$ = 4.33). By contrast, for the game with a self-serving narrative, participants exposed to a subtly-placed company logo ($M$ = 3.96) had a more positive attitude toward the game than to a prominently-placed company logo ($M$ = 3.62).

To investigate the interactions in greater detail, a series of planned contrasts were conducted. Results showed that the difference in a CSR-narrative condition was significant ($F(1, 127) = 5.43$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .04$), whereas the difference in a self-serving-narrative condition was not ($F(1, 127) = .61$, $p > .05$, $\eta^2 = .01$). Even though the difference was not significant, the negative effect of prominent placement existed for a self-serving narrative. For a CSR narrative, however, the negativity effect diminished and even prominent placement resulted in the opposite, leading to a more favorable attitude toward the game compared to subtle placement. Thus, given that the negative impact of prominent placement decreased for a CSR narrative, H3a was supported. See Figure 7.
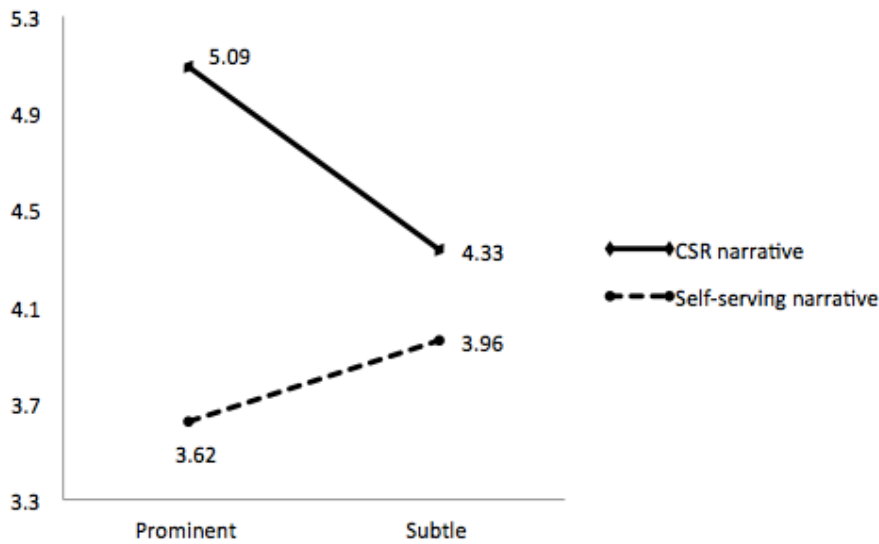


Figure 7:    Interaction of Narratives and Company Placement on Attitude toward the
            Game

***WOM Intention toward the Game***

Consistent with findings of attitude toward the game, participants who played the game with a CSR narrative showed higher WOM intention toward the game when they were exposed to a prominently-placed company logo ($M = 4.83$) than a subtly-placed one

($M = 4.07$). By contrast, participants who played the game with a self-serving narrative had greater WOM intention toward the company when the logo was subtly positioned ($M = 3.67$) than when prominently positioned ($M = 3.46$).

In terms of the interaction, additional planned contrast tests were examined. The results were the same as those for attitude toward the game, only the difference in the CSR-narrative condition being significant: $F_{CSR}(1, 126) = 7.19$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .05$; $F_{self\text{-}serving}(1, 126) = .29$, $p > .05$, $\eta^2 = .00$. For participants who played a game with a CSR narrative, the negative impact of prominent placement on intention to WOM about the game was less, or rather positive, compared to those who played a game with a self-serving narrative. Hence, H3b was also supported. See Figure 8.
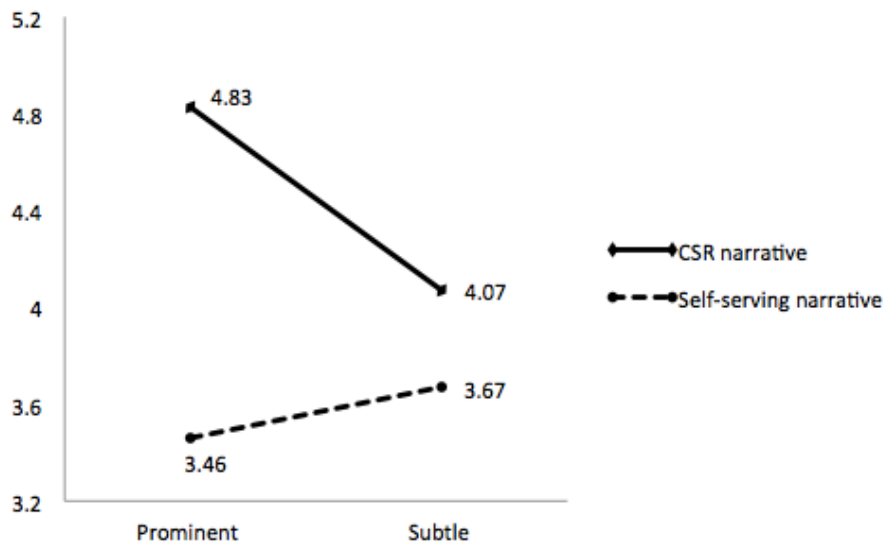


Figure 8:    Interaction of Narratives and Company Placement on WOM Intention toward the Game

***Attitude toward the Company***

In a CSR-narrative condition, participants exposed to a company logo in a prominent placement ($M = 6.06$) showed a more positive attitude toward the company

than toward the logo in a subtle placement ($M = 5.28$). In contrast, in a self-serving-narrative condition, participants exposed to a company logo in subtle placement ($M = 4.77$) revealed a more favorable attitude toward the company than when the logo was in a prominent placement ($M = 4.08$).

Results from a series of planned contrasts showed that the differences between prominent and subtle placement were significant in both conditions relative to the CSR narrative and the self-serving narrative: $F_{CSR}(1, 126) = 7.94, p < .01, \eta^2 = .06; F_{self\text{-}serving}(1, 126) = 3.79, p = .05, \eta^2 = .03$. These findings imply that the negative impact of a prominent placement was effective only for the self-serving narrative. In contrast to the self-serving narrative, when the CSR narrative was presented, prominent placement of the logo led to a less negative, rather a more positive attitude toward the company compared to subtle placement. Therefore, H3c was supported. See Figure 9.
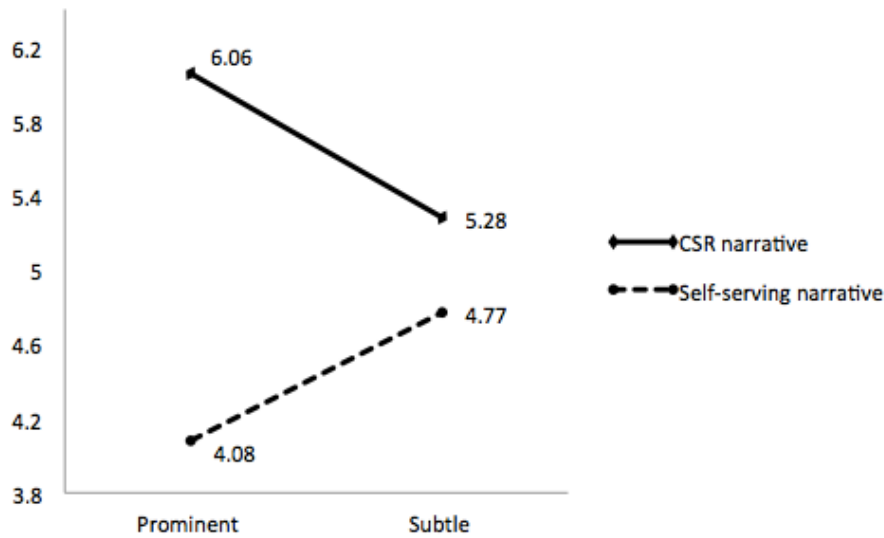


Figure 9:    Interaction of Narratives and Company Placement on Attitude toward the Company

*Company Evaluation*

For the game accompanied by a CSR narrative, a prominently-placed company logo ($M = 5.93$) also led to a more favorable company evaluation than when the logo was subtly-placed ($M = 5.44$). In contrast, for a game with a self-serving narrative, participants exposed to a company logo in subtle placement evaluated the company more positively ($M = 4.89$) than those exposed to the logo in prominent placement ($M = 4.32$).

A series of planned contrasts revealed that the differences between two company-placement conditions were significant for both CSR and self-serving narratives: $F_{CSR}(1, 126) = 4.08, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03; F_{self-serving}(1, 126) = 4.03, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$. Consistent with findings for attitude toward the company, prominent placement had a negative impact on company evaluation when accompanied by a self-serving narrative, whereas prominent placement rather worked positively for a CSR narrative. Thus, H3d was supported. See Figure 10. All descriptive statistics as to H1-H3 were presented in Table 12.
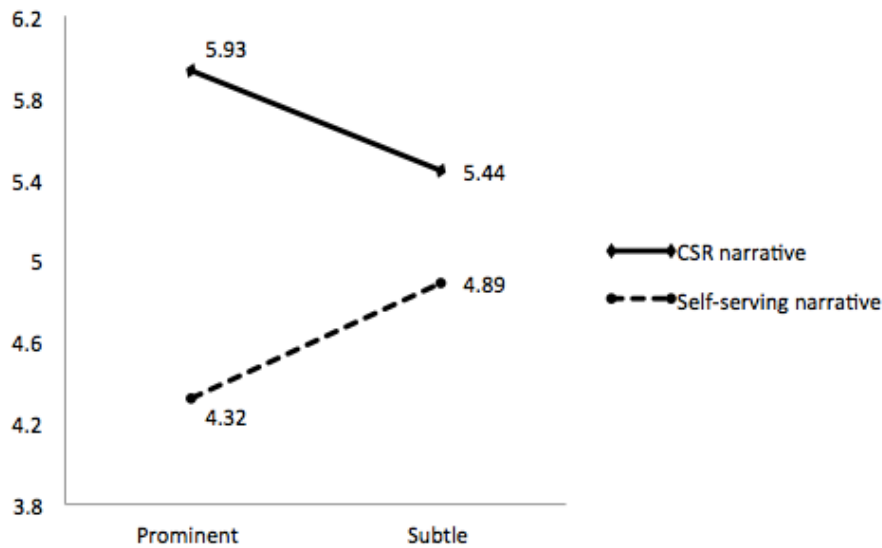


Figure 10:    Interaction of Narratives and Company Placement on Company Evaluation

| Narratives | Company placement | N | Attitude toward the Game | WOM intention toward the Game | Attitude toward the Company | Company Evaluation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Mean (Standard Deviation) | | | |
| CSR | Prominent | 36 | 5.09 (1.22) | 4.83 (1.04) | 6.06 (.95) | 5.93 (.84) |
| | Subtle | 48 | 4.33 (1.72) | 4.07 (1.38) | 5.28 (1.45) | 5.45 (1.18) |
| | Total | 84 | 4.65 (1.56) | 4.40 (1.30) | 5.62 (1.32) | 5.65 (1.07) |
| Self-serving | Prominent | 28 | 3.62 (1.52) | 3.46 (1.05) | 4.08 (1.10) | 4.32 (.83) |
| | Subtle | 19 | 3.96 (1.28) | 3.67 (1.38) | 4.77 (.94) | 4.89 (.81) |
| | Total | 47 | 3.76 (1.42) | 3.55 (1.18) | 4.36 (1.09) | 4.55 (.86) |
| Total | Prominent | 64 | 4.45 (1.54) | 4.23 (1.24) | 5.20 (1.42) | 5.23 (1.16) |
| | Subtle | 67 | 4.22 (1.60) | 3.96 (1.38) | 5.13 (1.34) | 5.29 (1.11) |
| | Total | 131 | 4.33 (1.57) | 4.09 (1.32) | 5.17 (1.37) | 5.26 (1.13) |

Table 12:    Descriptive Statistics (Narratives × Company placement)

**The Moderating Effect of CSR Support**

H4 and H5 posited a moderating effect of CSR support for philanthropy on relationships between two independent variables (narratives and company placement) and CSR outcomes. CSR support for philanthropy was categorized as low and high by using a median split ($M = 6.0$).

H4 expected that the positive effect of a CSR narrative in a game would be greater in subjects with a high level of CSR support than in those with a low level of CSR support. To examine the hypothesis, a series of two-way ANOVA and ANCOVA tests were conducted. While fixed variables were narratives and CSR support for philanthropy, each dependent variable was attitude toward the game, WOM intention toward the game, attitude toward the company, and company evaluation. The covariate, for three dependent

variables (WOM intention toward the game, attitude toward the company, company evaluation), was the fit between the company and the cause.

Results from a series of ANCOVA tests showed the fit between the company and the cause was significant as a covariate only for company-related dependent variables: attitude toward the company ($F$ (1, 126) = 7.75, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .06$) and company evaluation ($F$ (1, 126) = 11.64, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .09$). The fit was not a significant variable for WOM intention toward the game ($F$ (1, 126) = 1.32, $p > .05$, $\eta^2 = .01$)

As presented in Table 13, results showed that there was no interaction between narratives and CSR support for philanthropy: attitude toward the game $F_{attG}$ (1, 127) = .02, $p > .05$, $\eta^2 = .00$; WOM intention toward the game $F_{WOM}$ (1, 126) = .11, $p > .05$, $\eta^2 = .00$; attitude toward the company $F_{attC}$ (1, 126) = .03, $p > .05$, $\eta^2 = .00$; and company evaluation $F_{Ceva}$ (1, 126) = .44, $p > .05$, $\eta^2 = .00$. Thus, H4 was not supported. Descriptive statistics regarding H4 were shown in Table 14.

| | Attitude toward the Game | | WOM intention toward the Game | | Attitude toward the Company | | Company Evaluation | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | MS | F^b | MS | F^c | MS | F^c | MS | F^c |
| Fit | - | - | 2.08 | 1.32 | 11.37 | 7.75** | 10.73 | 11.64** |
| Narratives (NA) | 23.85 | 10.25** | 15.94 | 10.10** | 34.11 | 23.26*** | 25.73 | 27.91*** |
| CSR support^a | .14 | .06 | 1.93 | 1.22 | 5.01 | 3.41 | 1.78 | 1.93 |
| NA × CSR support^a | .04 | .02 | .17 | .11 | .04 | .03 | .41 | .44 |

[a] CSR support for philanthropy, [b] $df = (1, 127)$, [c] $df = (1, 126)$
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 13:    Summary of two-way ANOVA/ANCOVA (Narratives × CSR support for philanthropy)

| Narratives | CSR support[a] | N | Attitude toward the Game | WOM intention toward the Game | Attitude toward the Company | Company Evaluation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | **Mean (Standard Deviation)** | | | |
| CSR | Low | 41 | 4.60 (1.61) | 4.24 (1.18) | 5.70 (1.20) | 5.57 (1.11) |
| | High | 43 | 4.71 (1.54) | 4.55 (1.40) | 5.53 (1.43) | 5.73 (1.04) |
| | Total | 84 | 4.65 (1.56) | 4.40 (1.30) | 5.61 (1.32) | 5.65 (1.07) |
| Self-serving | Low | 26 | 3.74 (1.46) | 3.38 (1.27) | 4.51 (.99) | 4.69 (.85) |
| | High | 21 | 3.78 (1.40) | 3.75 (1.06) | 4.17 (1.19) | 4.37 (.85) |
| | Total | 47 | 3.76 (1.42) | 3.55 (1.18) | 4.36 (1.09) | 4.55 (.86) |
| Total | Low | 67 | 4.27 (1.60) | 3.91 (1.28) | 5.24 (1.26) | 5.23 (1.10) |
| | High | 64 | 4.40 (1.55) | 4.29 (1.34) | 5.09 (1.49) | 5.28 (1.17) |
| | Total | 131 | 4.33 (1.57) | 4.09 (1.32) | 5.17 (1.37) | 5.26 (1.13) |

[a] CSR support for philanthropy

Table 14:   Descriptive Statistics (Narratives × CSR support for philanthropy)

H5 predicted that the negative effect of prominent placement in a game would be greater in subjects with a high level of CSR support than in those with a low level of CSR support. The same as analyses for H4, a series of two-way ANOVA and ANCOVA tests were conducted. Fixed variables were company placement and CSR support for philanthropy, whereas each dependent variable was attitude toward the game, WOM intention toward the game, attitude toward the company, and company evaluation. For WOM intention toward the game, attitude toward the company, company evaluation, the fit between the company and the cause was put as a covariate.

ANCOVA showed that the fit between the company and the cause was significant as a covariate only for company-related dependent variables: attitude toward the company ($F (1, 126) = 14.53$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .10$) and company evaluation ($F (1, 126) =$

21.16, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .14$). The fit was not significant for WOM intention toward the game ($F (1, 126) = 3.53, p > .05$, $\eta^2 = .03$).

No interaction of company placement and CSR support for philanthropy was found: attitude toward the game $F_{attG} (1, 127) = .21, p > .05$, $\eta^2 = .00$; WOM intention toward the game $F_{WOM} (1, 126) = .00, p > .05$, $\eta^2 = .00$; attitude toward the company $F_{attC} (1, 126) = .70, p > .05$, $\eta^2 = .01$; and company evaluation $F_{Ceva} (1, 126) = .29, p > .05$, $\eta^2 = .00$ (See Table 15). Hence, H5 was not supported. Table 16 presented all descriptive statistics in terms of H5.

| | Attitude toward the Game | | WOM intention toward the Game | | Attitude toward the Company | | Company Evaluation | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | MS | F[b] | MS | F[c] | MS | F[c] | MS | F[c] |
| Fit | - | - | 5.98 | 3.53 | 25.18 | 14.53*** | 23.75 | 21.16*** |
| Company placement (CP) | 1.51 | .60 | 2.11 | 1.25 | .14 | .08 | .18 | .16 |
| CSR support[a] | .46 | .18 | 1.36 | .90 | 6.13 | 3.54 | 1.73 | 1.54 |
| CP × CSR support[a] | .51 | .21 | .00 | .00 | 1.22 | .70 | .32 | .29 |

[a] CSR support for philanthropy, [b] $df = (1, 127)$, [c] $df = (1, 126)$
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 15:　Summary of two-way ANOVA/ANCOVA (Company placement × CSR support for philanthropy)

| Company placement | CSR support[a] | N | Attitude toward the Game | WOM intention toward the Game | Attitude toward the Company | Company Evaluation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Mean (Standard Deviation) | | | |
| Prominent | Low | 31 | 4.45 (1.41) | 4.05 (1.10) | 5.18 (1.26) | 5.15 (1.06) |
| | High | 33 | 4.44 (1.67) | 4.40 (1.36) | 5.21 (1.57) | 5.29 (1.26) |
| | Total | 64 | 4.45 (1.54) | 4.23 (1.24) | 5.20 (1.42) | 5.23 (1.16) |
| Subtle | Low | 36 | 4.11 (1.75) | 3.78 (1.42) | 5.29 (1.28) | 5.30 (1.14) |
| | High | 31 | 4.35 (1.43) | 4.16 (1.34) | 4.96 (1.41) | 5.27 (1.09) |
| | Total | 67 | 4.22 (1.60) | 3.96 (1.38) | 5.13 (1.34) | 5.29 (1.11) |
| Total | Low | 67 | 4.27 (1.60) | 3.91 (1.28) | 5.24 (1.26) | 5.23 (1.10) |
| | High | 64 | 4.40 (1.55) | 4.29 (1.34) | 5.09 (1.49) | 5.28 (1.17) |
| | Total | 131 | 4.33 (1.57) | 4.09 (1.32) | 5.17 (1.37) | 5.26 (1.13) |

[a] CSR support for philanthropy

Table 16: Descriptive Statistics (Narratives × CSR support for philanthropy)

**Interplay of Narratives, Company Placement, and CSR Support**

Finally, H6 expected that there would be a three-way interaction effect of narrative, company placement and CSR support on attitude toward the game (H6a), WOM intention toward the game (H6b), attitude toward the company (H6c), and company evaluation (H6d).

To investigate the interplay of narratives, company placement, and CSR support, a series of three-way ANOVA and ANCOVA tests were conducted. Fixed variables were narratives, company placement, and CSR support for philanthropy, whereas dependent variables for each analysis were attitude toward the game, WOM intention toward the game, attitude toward the company, and company evaluation. Except for attitude toward the game, the fit between the company and the cause was employed as a covariate for the rest of the dependent variables – WOM intention toward the game, attitude toward the company, and company evaluation.

Consistent with the previous findings mentioned above, the fit between the company and the cause was a significant covariate for attitude toward the company ($F$ (1, 122) = 6.76, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .05$) and company evaluation ($F$ (1, 122) = 10.25, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .08$), whereas it was not significant for WOM intention toward the game ($F$ (1, 122) = 1.06, $p > .05$, $\eta^2 = .01$).

Findings revealed that there was no three-way interaction for all dependent variables: attitude toward the game $F_{attG}$ (1, 123) = .07, $p > .05$, $\eta^2 = .00$; WOM intention toward the game $F_{WOM}$ (1, 122) = 1.93, $p > .05$, $\eta^2 = .02$; attitude toward the company $F_{attC}$ (1, 122) = .56, $p > .05$, $\eta^2 = .01$; and company evaluation $F_{Ceva}$ (1, 122) = .02, $p > .05$, $\eta^2 = .00$ (See Table 17). Thus, H6a-H6d were not supported.

| | Attitude toward the Game | | WOM intention toward the Game | | Attitude toward the Company | | Company Evaluation | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | MS | $F^b$ | MS | $F^c$ | MS | $F^c$ | MS | $F^c$ |
| Fit | - | - | 1.61 | 1.06 | 9.29 | 6.76* | 9.17 | 10.25** |
| Narratives (NA) | 22.69 | 9.91** | 14.84 | 9.82** | 31.79 | 23.12*** | 23.85 | 26.66 |
| Company placement (CP) | .99 | .43 | 1.15 | .76 | .04 | .03 | .06 | .07 |
| CSR support[a] | .29 | .13 | 3.13 | 2.07 | 3.33 | 2.42 | 1.22 | 1.37 |
| NA × CP | 9.54 | 4.17* | 7.68 | 5.08* | 13.09 | 9.52** | 5.97 | 6.67* |
| NA× CSR support[a] | .03 | .01 | .49 | .32 | .10 | .07 | .32 | .35 |
| CP × CSR support[a] | .67 | .29 | .48 | .32 | .48 | .35 | .36 | .40 |
| NA × CP × CSR support[a] | .15 | .07 | 2.92 | 1.93 | .77 | .56 | .02 | .02 |

[a] CSR support for philanthropy, [b] $df = (1, 123)$, [c] $df = (1, 122)$
$* p < .05$, $** p < .01$, $*** p < .001$

Table 17: Summary of three-way ANOVA/ANCOVA (Narratives × Company placement × CSR support for philanthropy)

| | | | | AttG[b] | WOM[c] | AttC[d] | CE[e] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Narratives** | **Company placement** | **CSR support[a]** | **N** | **Mean (Standard Deviation)** | | | |
| CSR | Prominent | Low | 17 | 5.10 (1.01) | 4.57 (.98) | 6.00 (.88) | 5.79 (.88) |
| | | High | 19 | 5.09 (1.40) | 5.07 (1.06) | 6.12 (1.03) | 6.06 (.82) |
| | | Total | 36 | 5.09 (1.22) | 4.83 (1.04) | 6.06 (.95) | 5.93 (.84) |
| | Subtle | Low | 24 | 4.25 (1.86) | 4.00 (1.27) | 5.49 (1.36) | 5.42 (1.24) |
| | | High | 24 | 4.40 (1.60) | 4.14 (1.51) | 5.07 (1.54) | 5.47 (1.13) |
| | | Total | 48 | 4.33 (1.72) | 4.07 (1.38) | 5.28 (1.45) | 5.45 (1.18) |
| | Total | Low | 41 | 4.60 (1.61) | 4.24 (1.18) | 5.70 (1.20) | 5.57 (1.11) |
| | | High | 43 | 4.71 (1.54) | 4.55 (1.40) | 5.53 (1.43) | 5.73 (1.04) |
| | | Total | 84 | 4.65 (1.56) | 4.40 (1.30) | 5.61 (1.32) | 5.65 (1.07) |
| Self-serving | Prominent | Low | 14 | 3.67 (1.45) | 3.43 (.92) | 4.19 (.86) | 4.38 (.68) |
| | | High | 14 | 3.57 (1.64) | 3.50 (1.20) | 3.98 (1.32) | 4.26 (.98) |
| | | Total | 28 | 3.62 (1.52) | 3.46 (1.05) | 4.08 (1.10) | 4.32 (.83) |
| | Subtle | Low | 12 | 3.83 (1.54) | 3.33 (1.63) | 4.89 (1.04) | 5.06 (.91) |
| | | High | 7 | 4.19 (.66) | 4.24 (.46) | 4.57 (.79) | 4.59 (.52) |
| | | Total | 19 | 3.96 (1.28) | 3.67 (1.38) | 4.77 (.94) | 4.89 (.81) |
| | Total | Low | 26 | 3.74 (1.46) | 3.38 (1.27) | 4.51 (.99) | 4.69 (.85) |
| | | High | 21 | 3.78 (1.40) | 3.75 (1.06) | 4.17 (1.19) | 4.37 (.85) |
| | | Total | 47 | 3.76 (1.42) | 3.55 (1.18) | 4.36 (1.08) | 4.55 (.86) |
| Total | Prominent | Low | 31 | 4.45 (1.41) | 4.05 (1.10) | 5.18 (1.26) | 5.15 (1.06) |
| | | High | 33 | 4.44 (1.67) | 4.40 (1.36) | 5.21 (1.57) | 5.29 (1.26) |
| | | Total | 64 | 4.45 (1.54) | 4.23 (1.24) | 5.20 (1.42) | 5.23 (1.16) |
| | Subtle | Low | 36 | 4.11 (1.75) | 3.78 (1.42) | 5.29 (1.28) | 5.30 (1.14) |
| | | High | 31 | 4.35 (1.43) | 4.16 (1.34) | 4.96 (1.41) | 5.27 (1.09) |
| | | Total | 67 | 4.22 (1.60) | 3.96 (1.38) | 5.13 (1.34) | 5.29 (1.11) |
| | Total | Low | 67 | 4.27 (1.60) | 3.91 (1.28) | 5.24 (1.26) | 5.23 (1.10) |
| | | High | 64 | 4.40 (1.55) | 4.29 (1.34) | 5.09 (1.49) | 5.28 (1.17) |
| | | Total | 131 | 4.33 (1.57) | 4.09 (1.32) | 5.17 (1.37) | 5.26 (1.13) |

[a] CSR support for philanthropy, [b] attitude toward the game, [c] WOM intention toward the game, [d] attitude toward the company, [e] company evaluation

Table 18: Descriptive Statistics (Narratives × Company placement × CSR support for philanthropy)

# Chapter 6:    Additional Analysis and Results

The current dissertation research conducted additional analysis with two variables to enhance our understanding of results in Chapter 5. First, this research considered the fit between the company and the cause as a covariate. Interestingly, the impact of the fit was found to be effective only for company-related dependent variables – attitude toward the company and company evaluation. Given that the fit between the company and the cause was not directly associated with the game, the findings were understandable. Furthermore, the findings imply that the fit may influence the impact of narratives and company placement on attitude toward the company and company evaluation. Indeed, literature has proved that consumer response to CSR initiatives vary by the fit between the company and the cause. Thus, this dissertation research additionally examines the moderating role of the fit in terms of company-related outcomes.

The other variable that requires further investigation is game engagement. Based on previous studies on narratives (Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2011; Niederdeppe, Shapiro, & Porticella, 2011; Oliver et al., 2012; Shin, Lee, & Lee, 2003), it was suggested that a CSR narrative would let players be more immersive and engaged in game play and in turn, through the game engagement, lead to more favorable outcomes. As expected in H1a-H1d, findings showed the positive impact of CSR narratives on consumer response. Therefore, this current research further seeks to examine the mediating role of game engagement.

## FIT BETWEEN THE COMPANY AND THE CAUSE AS A MODERATOR

The company-cause fit, the extent to which a social cause that a company is involved in is compatible with the identity, mission, and values of the company (Bigné-Alcañiz et al., 2012; Lafferty, 2007), has been examined as a moderator in other studies.

For instance, Bigné-Alcañiz and colleagues (2012) examined the moderating impact of cause-brand fit on a relationship between corporate associations and brand attitude in a context of CRM. There were two types of corporate associations considered: Corporate Ability (CA) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) associations. The term CA associations refers to "the perception of brand experience and effectiveness in producing goods or services," whereas the term CSR associations refers to "the brand's social nature or desire for social commitment." (Bigné-Alcañiz et al., 2012, p. 267). Findings of previous research have revealed that when the fit is perceived as high, consumers are more accessible to CSR associations rather than to CA associations due to the compatibility between a brand and a social cause. CSR associations, in turn, may be positively transferred to the brand so that consumers are likely to have a more favorable attitude toward the brand. In contrast, when the fit is perceived as low, the impact of CA associations that reflect the brand's performance in products/services is greater than that of CSR associations. Those earlier findings are consistent with ones from Chen, Su, and He (2014). Chen and colleagues (2014) also found an interplay of cause-brand fit and corporate association. Results further confirmed that CSR associations have a stronger impact on company evaluation when cause-brand fit is high, whereas CA associations have a greater impact on the company evaluation when the fit is low.

Given the findings discussed above, it was expected that the impact of narratives and company placement on CSR outcomes would differ depending on the fit between the company and the cause. Thus, the following hypotheses are put forth.

**H7**: The impact of narratives and company placement on (a) attitude toward the company, and (b) company evaluation will vary by a level of fit between the company and the cause.

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Using a median split, the current study categorized the fit into two levels: low vs. high. Since the Box M assumption was not satisfied ($p > .05$; Hair, Tatham, Anderson, & Black, 1998), a series of three-way ANOVA tests were conducted for each dependent variable. The fixed variables were narratives, company placement, and fit between the company and the cause, while the dependent variables were attitude toward the company and company evaluation, respectively.

**Interplay of Narratives, Company Placement, and Fit**

*Attitude toward the Company*

Results from an ANOVA test showed a three-way interaction of narratives, company placement, and fit between the company and the cause ($F (1, 123) = 6.66$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .05$). See Table 19.

| | Attitude toward the Company | | Company Evaluation | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | MS | F | MS | F |
| Narratives (NA) | 39.27 | 28.38*** | 30.42 | 32.35*** |
| Company placement (CP) | .24 | .17 | .74 | .79 |
| Fit[a] | .00 | .00 | .16 | .17 |
| NA × CP | 20.84 | 15.06*** | 11.02 | 11.72** |
| NA× Fit[a] | .14 | .10 | .01 | .01 |
| CP × Fit[a] | .71 | .52 | 1.45 | 1.54 |
| NA × CP × Fit[a] | 9.22 | 6.66* | 3.99 | 4.25* |

[a] Fit between the company and the cause
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, $df = (1, 123)$

Table 19:   Summary of three-way ANOVA/ANCOVA (Narratives × Company placement × Fit)

| Narratives | Company placement | Fit[a] | N | Attitude toward the Company | Company Evaluation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | **Mean (Standard Deviation)** | |
| CSR | Prominent | Low | 17 | 5.88 (.94) | 5.80 (.85) |
| | | High | 19 | 6.23 (.96) | 6.05 (.85) |
| | | Total | 36 | 6.06 (.95) | 5.93 (.84) |
| | Subtle | Low | 26 | 5.51 (1.28) | 5.47 (1.22) |
| | | High | 22 | 5.00 (1.62) | 5.42 (1.14) |
| | | Total | 48 | 5.28 (1.45) | 5.45 (1.18) |
| | Total | Low | 43 | 5.66 (1.16) | 5.60 (1.09) |
| | | High | 41 | 5.57 (1.47) | 5.71 (1.05) |
| | | Total | 84 | 5.61 (1.32) | 5.65 (1.07) |
| Self-serving | Prominent | Low | 20 | 4.28 (1.05) | 4.48 (.75) |
| | | High | 8 | 3.58 (1.14) | 3.91 (.92) |
| | | Total | 28 | 4.08 (1.10) | 4.32 (.83) |
| | Subtle | Low | 13 | 4.51 (.70) | 4.67 (.55) |
| | | High | 6 | 5.33 (1.21) | 5.36 (1.10) |
| | | Total | 19 | 4.77 (.94) | 4.89 (.81) |
| | Total | Low | 33 | 4.37 (.92) | 4.55 (.68) |
| | | High | 14 | 4.33 (1.44) | 4.53 (1.21) |
| | | Total | 47 | 4.36 (1.09) | 4.55 (.86) |
| Total | Prominent | Low | 37 | 5.02 (1.28) | 5.08 (1.03) |
| | | High | 27 | 5.44 (1.58) | 5.42 (1.31) |
| | | Total | 64 | 5.20 (1.42) | 5.23 (1.16) |
| | Subtle | Low | 39 | 5.18 (1.21) | 5.21 (1.11) |
| | | High | 28 | 5.07 (1.53) | 5.40 (1.11) |
| | | Total | 67 | 5.13 (1.34) | 5.29 (1.11) |
| | Total | Low | 76 | 5.10 (1.24) | 5.15 (1.07) |
| | | High | 55 | 5.25 (1.55) | 5.41 (1.20) |
| | | Total | 131 | 5.17 (1.37) | 5.26 (1.13) |

[a] Fit between the company and the cause

Table 20:   Descriptive Statistics (Narratives × Company placement × Fit between the company and the cause)

To examine the three-way interaction in detail, the impact of narratives and company placement was analyzed by each fit (low vs. high), respectively. For those who perceived the fit as low, there was no interaction of narratives and company placement ($F$ $(1, 72) = 1.40, p > .05,$ $\eta^2 = .02$; Figure 11).
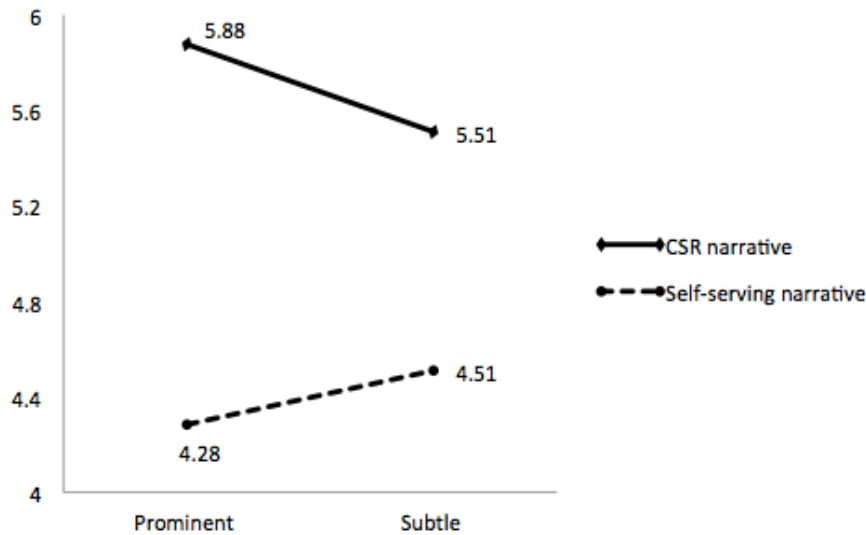


Figure 11:    Interaction of Narratives and Company Placement on Attitude toward the Company (Low Fit)

By contrast, for those who perceived the fit as high, there was a significant interaction between narratives and company placement ($F(1, 51) = 13.19, p < .01,$ $\eta^2 = .21$). Specifically, in a CSR-narrative condition, the participants who were exposed to a company logo in prominent placement ($M = 6.23$) reported a more positive attitude toward the company than participants who were exposed to the subtle placement ($M = 5.00$). In a self-serving-narrative condition, participants exposed to a subtly-placed company logo had a more favorable attitude ($M = 5.33$) than those exposed to a prominently-placed one ($M = 3.58$). Additional planned contrasts showed that both

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differences were significant: $F_{CSR}$ (1, 51) = 8.92, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .15$; $F_{\text{self-serving}}$ (1, 51) = 6.09, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .11$. See Figure 12.
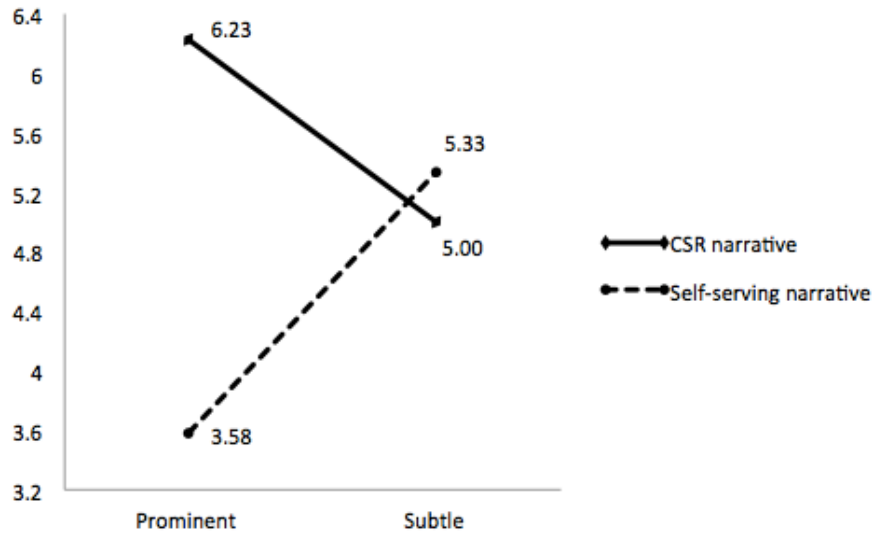


Figure 12:    Interaction of Narratives and Company Placement on Attitude toward the Company (High Fit)

## *Company Evaluation*

In terms of company evaluation, the current study also found a three-way interaction of narratives, company placement, and fit between the company and the cause ($F$ (1, 123) = 4.25, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .03$). To investigate the three-way interaction, the effects of narratives and company placement were analyzed for each level of fit: low vs. high.

The same for attitude toward the company, for a low level of fit, there was no interaction between narratives and company placement ($F$ (1, 72) = 1.36, $p > .05$, $\eta^2 = .02$; Figure 13).
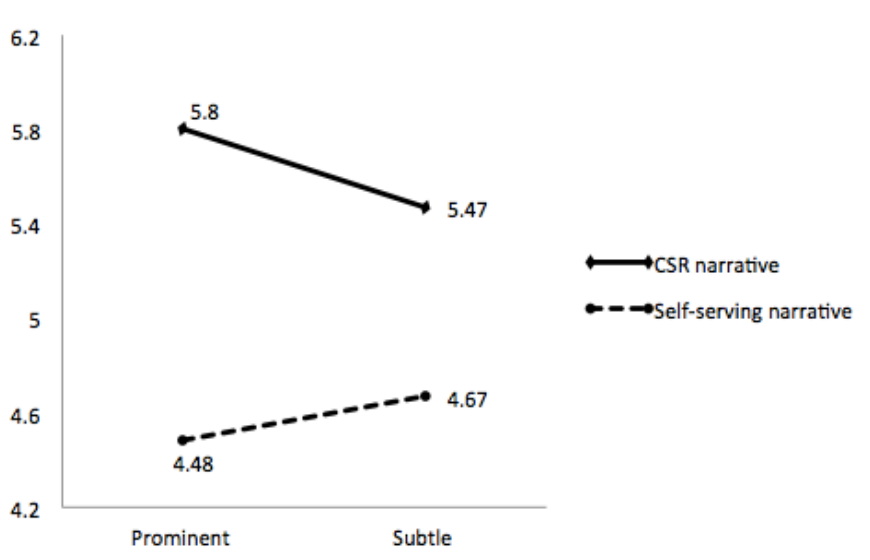
Figure 13:    Interaction of Narratives and Company Placement on Company Evaluation (Low Fit)

On the other hand, in terms of a high level of fit, the interaction of narratives and company placement was found to be significant ($F(1, 51) = 10.86, p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .18$). For the game with a CSR narrative, participants exposed to a prominently-placed company logo ($M = 6.05$) evaluated the company more favorably than participants exposed to a subtly-placed company logo ($M = 5.42$). In contrast, for the game with a self-serving narrative, participants assessed the company more positively when they were exposed to the company logo in subtle placement ($M = 5.36$) than the logo in prominent placement ($M = 3.91$). Additional planned contrasts revealed that both differences were statistically significant ($F_{CSR}(1, 51) = 4.03$, $p = .05$, $\eta^2 = .07$; $F_{self\text{-}serving}(1, 51) = 6.99$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .12$). See Figure 14.
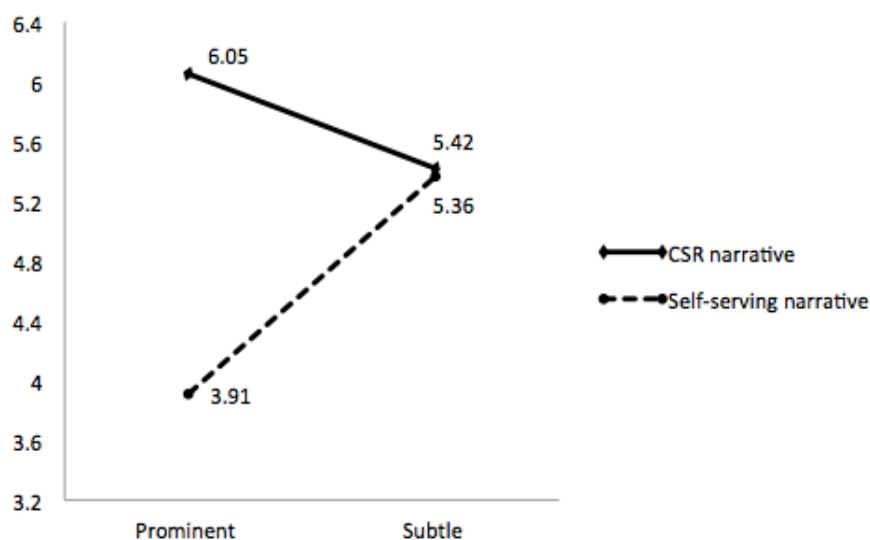
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Figure 14:   Interaction of Narratives and Company Placement on Company Evaluation
(High Fit)

|  |  | Attitude toward the Company | | Company Evaluation | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  | MS | F | MS | F |
| Low fit[a] | Narratives (NA) | 30.13 | 26.29*** | 20.08 | 22.82*** |
|  | Company placement (CP) | .09 | .08 | .08 | .09 |
|  | NA × CP | 1.60 | 1.40 | 1.20 | 1.36 |
| High fit[b] | Narratives (NA) | 13.71 | 7.95** | 12.42 | 12.11** |
|  | Company placement (CP) | .70 | .41 | 1.68 | 1.64 |
|  | NA × CP | 22.76 | 13.19** | 11.14 | 10.86** |

[a] $df = (1, 72)$, [b] $df = (1, 51)$
** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$,

Table 21:   Summary of two-way ANOVAs (Narratives × Company placement)

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Results in Chapter 5 demonstrated that a CSR narrative had a positive impact on consumer response, compared to a self-serving condition where subjects play a game without the CSR narrative. The findings were based on the assumption that higher game engagement that resulted from the CSR narrative led to desired consumer outcomes. Prior studies have provided evidence that narratives produced more enjoyment, immersion, and arousal for managing assigned tasks (Adaval & Wyer, 1998; Escalas, 2004; Giannakos et al., 2012; Schneider et al., 2004; Yee et al., 2010). For example, Rowe and colleagues found that narrative-centered learning environments caused students to have more engagement and in turn resulted in better learning outcomes. Yee et al. (2010) also revealed that the presence of narratives in games allowed players to be more involved and subsequently have greater enjoyment. Based on these findings, the following hypotheses are put forth:

**H8**: Game engagement will mediate the relationship between narratives and (a) attitude toward the game, (b) WOM intention toward the game, (c) attitude toward the company, and (d) company evaluation.

To investigate the hypotheses that proposed the mediating role of game engagement in the relationship between the narratives and the four dependent variables, the current study conducted Hayes's (2013) PROCESS macro with bootstrapped samples (5,000). Given that the interplay between narratives and company placement was significant, Model 5 where company placement was entered as a moderator was employed.

Results demonstrated the significant mediating effect of game engagement on the relationships between narratives and four dependent variables. Specifically, in terms of attitude toward the game, the indirect effect coefficient (IEC) was -.285 with 95% Confidence Interval (CI) [-.058, -.556]. For WOM intention toward the game, the IEC was -.198 with 95% CI [-.054, -.422]. Regarding attitude toward the company, the IEC was -.079 with 95% CI [-.006, -.222]. Finally, the IEC for company evaluation was -.098 with 95% CI [-.029, -.242]. The negative IEC showed that compared to a self-serving narrative, a CSR narrative produced greater game engagement. As shown in Figure 15-18, the engagement in turn exerted a positive impact on consumer response to the game and the company.
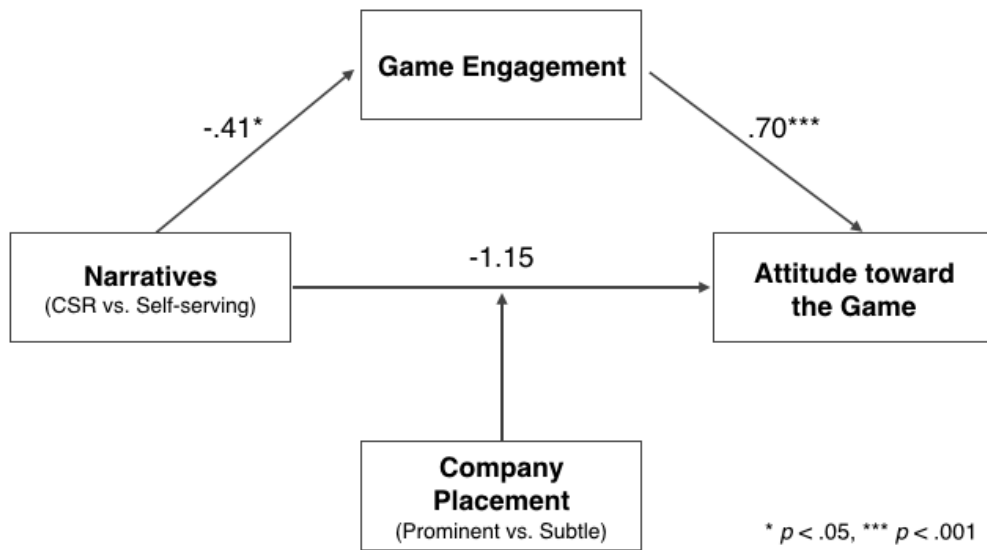


Figure 15:    Mediating Impact of Game Engagement on Attitude toward the Game
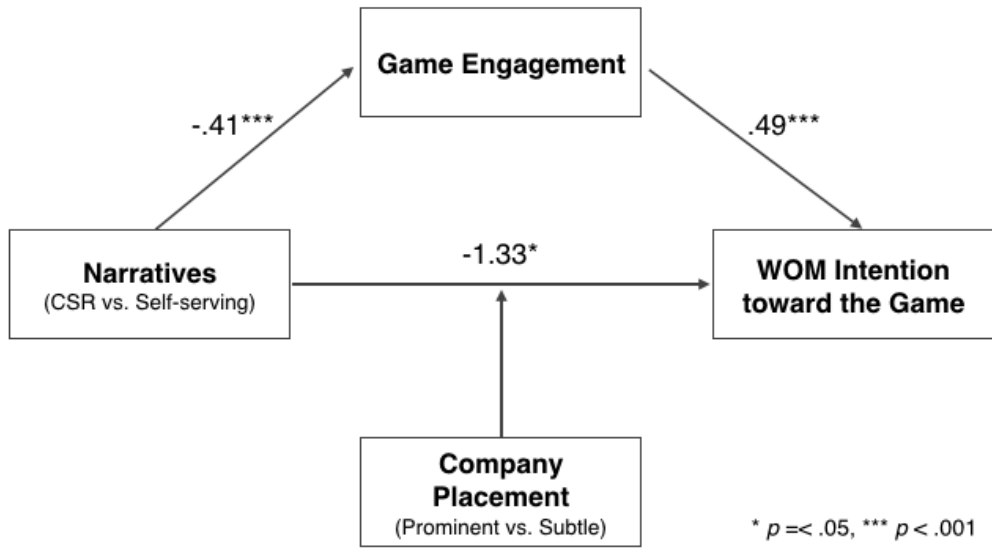
Figure 16:   Mediating Impact of Game Engagement on WOM Intention toward the
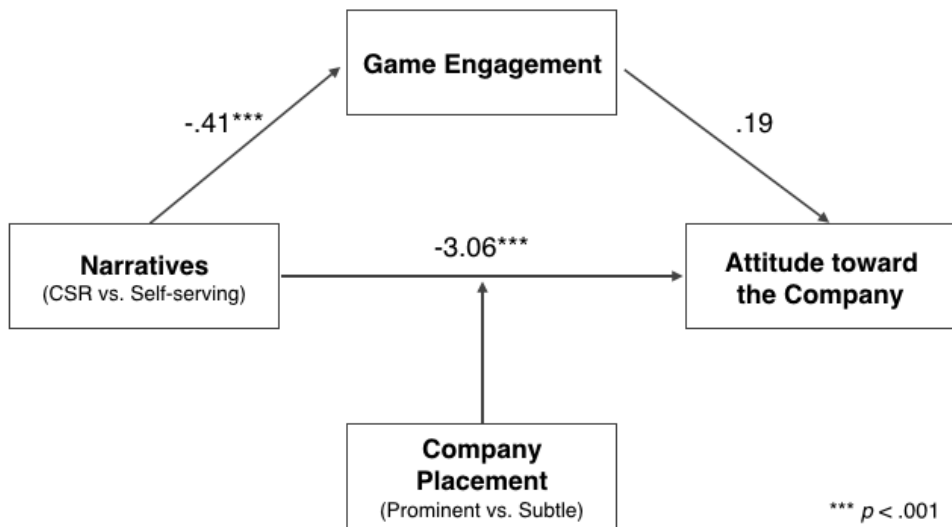Game



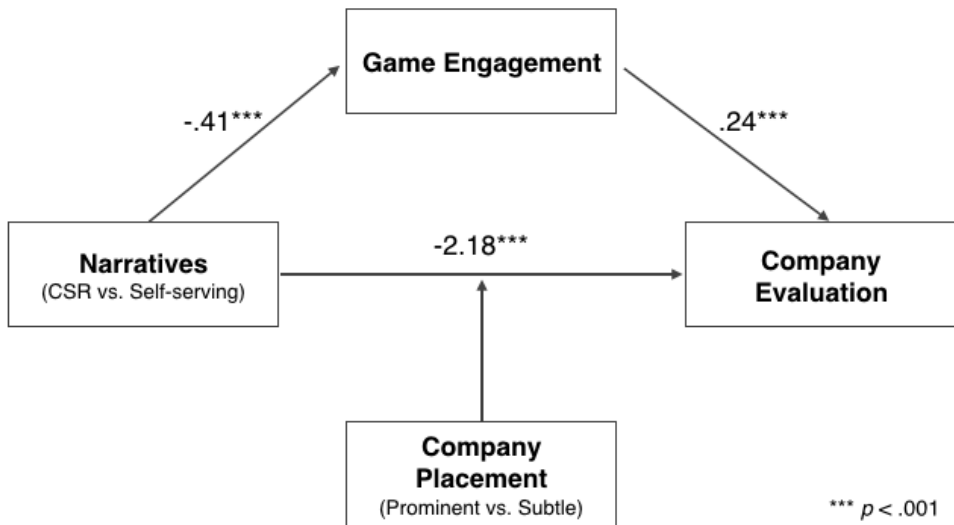Figure 17:   Mediating Impact of Game Engagement on Attitude toward the Company

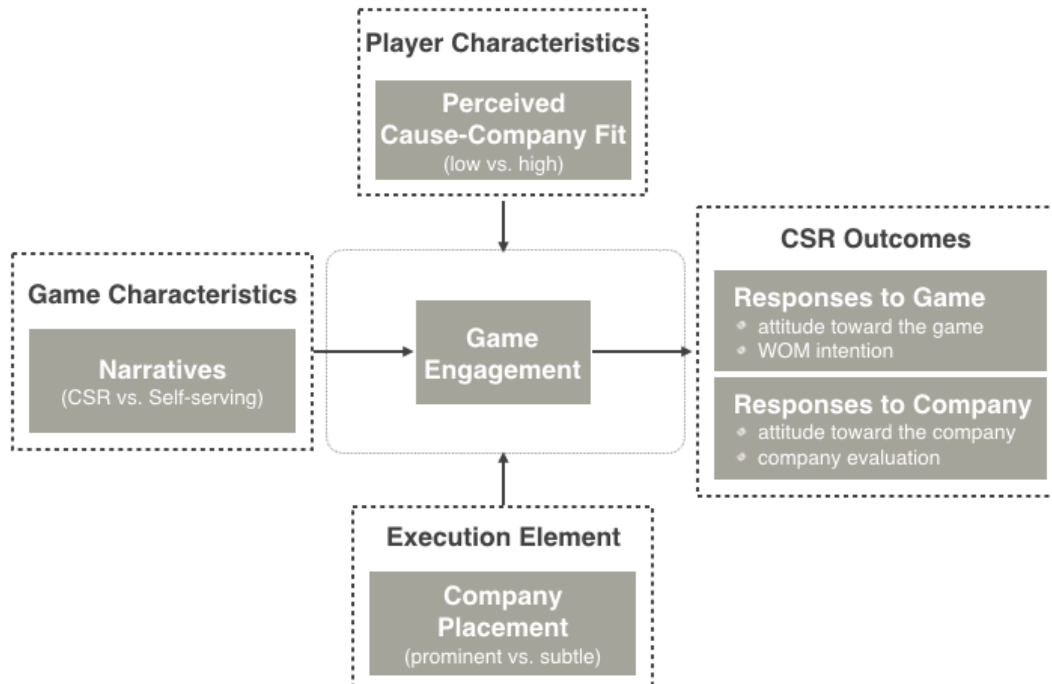Figure 18:    Mediating Impact of Game Engagement on Attitude toward Company
Evaluation



Figure 19:    Final Integrated Framework

| Hypotheses | Results |
|---|---|
| H1: Subjects who play a game with a CSR narrative will show (a) more positive attitude toward the game, (b) higher WOM intention toward the game, (c) more favorable attitude toward the company, and (d) more favorable company evaluation compared to those who play the game with a self-serving narrative. | Supported |
| H2: Subjects exposed to a prominently-placed company logo in a game will have (a) less positive attitudes toward the game, (b) lower WOM intention toward the game, (c) less favorable attitude toward the company, and (d) less favorable company evaluation than those exposed to a subtly-placed company logo. | Not supported |
| H3: The negative effect of prominent placement in a game will decrease in subjects who play a game with a CSR narrative than in those who play a game with a self-serving narrative in terms of (a) attitude toward the game, (b) WOM intention toward the game, (c) attitude toward the company, and (d) company evaluation. | Supported |
| H4: In a CSR-narrative game condition, the positive effect of CSR narratives in a game will be greater in subjects with a high level of CSR support than in those with a low level of CSR support, whereas in a self-serving-narrative game condition, there will be no difference by level of CSR support. | Not supported |
| H5: The negative effect of prominent placement in a game will be greater in subjects with a high level of CSR support than in those with a low level of CSR support. | Not supported |
| H6: There is a three-way interaction effect of narrative, company placement and CSR support on (a) attitude toward the game, (b) WOM intention toward the game, (c) attitude toward the company, and (d) company evaluation. | Not supported |
| **Additionally Suggested Hypotheses** | **Results** |
| H7: The impact of narratives and company placement on (a) attitude toward the company, and (b) company evaluation will vary by a level of fit between the company and the cause. | Supported |
| H8: Game engagement will mediate the relationship between narratives and (a) attitude toward the game, (b) WOM intention toward the game, (c) attitude toward the company, and (d) company evaluation. | Supported |

Table 22:    Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

# Chapter 7:   Discussion

This research explored how CSR gamification influences CSR outcomes. Through development of a mobile game designed specifically for this study, the impact of narratives, company placement, and CSR support were examined. Based on data collected from college students, a favorable impact of game narratives was found. Those who played the game with a CSR narrative showed more positive CSR outcomes than those who played the game with a self-serving narrative. The self-serving narrative in this research asked subjects to seek high scores or points to get to the next level, similar to instructions that general games players are given. Findings of this study imply that games with CSR narratives are effective in providing individuals with meaningful reasons to play CSR games, compared to general game play. Players who were offered the opportunity to support a social cause were likely to be more engaged and immersed. Moreover, these findings suggest that the increased game engagement may lead to more favorable consumer response to companies and their brands, a finding that is consistent with prior research on narratives (Moyer-Gusé, 2008; Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010; Schneider et al., 2004; Slater & Rouner, 2002).

In contradiction to previous research on product placement, the current research found an interaction effect between narratives and company placement. Previous research suggests prominent placement, compared to subtle placement, tends to lead to a more negative attitude and evaluation of brands (Cowley & Barron, 2008; Homer, 2009; Peters & Leshner, 2013; van Reijmersdal, 2009). In this research, while a negative attitude toward prominent placement was observed in a game condition with a self-serving narrative, findings from a game condition with a CSR narrative demonstrated the opposite tendency. Participants who played a game with a CSR narrative showed a more

favorable response when they were exposed to a company logo in prominent placement than when they were exposed to a logo in subtle placement. This may be explained by the impact that prominent placement has on recall and recognition. Previous studies on product placement demonstrated that prominent placement leads to higher recall than subtle placement (Brennan et al., 1999; Gupta & Lord, 1998; Lee & Faber, 2007; Nelson, 2002; Posner et al., 1976; Russell, 2002; Schneider & Cornwell, 2005). Prior studies also showed that prosocial games tend to promote players' prosocial thoughts, affect, and behavior (Buckely & Anderson, 2006; Gentile et al., 2009; Greitemeyer & Osswald, 2010). Given that game content can also influence evaluation of brands presented in a game (McCarty & Lowrey, 2012; Waiguny et al., 2013), the prosocial thoughts, affect, and behavior that result from CSR associations may spill over to the company in those games where a CSR narrative is embedded. As a result, the spillover effect may lead to positive outcomes in terms of overall company evaluation. Based on that line of reasoning, participants in the current research who were exposed to the CSR narrative may have been more likely to access prosocial thoughts and affect associated with the CSR activity when they were exposed to prominent placement versus subtle placement. The positive associations, in turn, may have influenced players to have more favorable outcomes toward the embedded company, in contrast to outcomes where the company was embedded in games with self-serving narratives. Contradictory to prior studies that found a negative effect for prominent placement, the findings in this research showed that the impact of prominent placement varied relative to game narratives. That finding suggests when a company seeks to communicate its CSR initiative via a game, it is better to position the company logo prominently rather than subtly so that players are more likely to access the logo and associate positive thoughts and affect with the company.

The impact of game engagement on the relationship between narratives and CSR outcomes is another issue that was examined by the current research. Previous studies have suggested that narratives motivate players to become more immersive and involved and better able to identify with a character in a game, thereby leading to players' having a greater sense of presence, physiological arousal, and enjoyment (Schneider et al., 2004; Yee et al., 2010). That line of research implies that game engagement may play a mediator role when narratives influence CSR outcomes. Findings from the current study support that assumption. Compared to games with a self-serving narrative, it was found that a CSR narrative led to higher game engagement, and, in turn, resulted in more favorable CSR outcomes. The findings of the current research also provide supportive evidence that the gamification approach promotes consumer engagement and participation in companies' CSR activities.

This dissertation research did not find a moderating effect of CSR support. As noted in the Results section, the mean scores were high and the standard deviation was low, indicating that data related to CSR support for philanthropy had a high level of skewness and kurtosis. Those findings imply that most participants considered CSR support for philanthropy as an inevitable responsibility of companies. In that respect, both the high mean and the small variance in CSR support for philanthropy may have resulted in no effect as a moderator.

The descriptive statistics of CSR support for philanthropy found in this research are similar to findings in other CSR domains, including support for the environment and support for employees: that is, high mean scores and low standard deviation. Indeed, according to a CSR report by Cone Communications (2015), nearly 90% of respondents across the world expect companies to take responsible actions in support of social and environmental issues. The likelihood that consumers will switch to brands associated

with a social cause is on the rise, showing a high of 90% in 2015 vs. 66% in 1999 (Cone & Roper Starch Worldwide, 1999; Cone Communications, 2015). Therefore, in the current research it would have been more appropriate to ask participants about the relative priority of the domain addressed by the game narrative compared to other domains, rather than to have asked about their absolute support for each CSR domain.

Because CSR support often covers a range of domains extending across the environment, employees, and community, even a specific domain can involve various activities (Rao, 2005; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Staples, 2004). For example, CSR support for the environment may involve sustaining an eco-friendly environment, producing products supportive of the environment, development of waste management systems, recycling, and more. In a similar way, CSR support for employees may cover safety, job security, profit sharing, employee participation, treating employees fairly and equitably, and more. In that sense, the posing of only three questions about CSR support for philanthropy by this research may have been too general. In other words, it may have been more appropriate to ask participants specifically about their support for hunger relief for people in need in the U.S., which was the purpose stated in the CSR narrative designed for this research.

While CSR support for philanthropy was not found, this research did find a moderating role of fit between the company and the cause. Findings showed the interplay between narratives and company placement was limited to those participants who perceived the fit to be high. By contrast, among participants who perceived the fit to be low, there was no interaction. Previous research found that when the cause-brand fit is low, individuals tend to evaluate a company based on its corporate ability (CA) association, such as corporate performance relative to products/services (Bigné-Alcañiz et al., 2012; Chen et al., 2014). The fact that the current research used a fictitious

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company to prevent any compounding effects that might have resulted from pre-experience and opinions of existing brands, those participants who perceived the fit to be low may have found it difficult to employ CA associations.

## LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This research has several limitations. First, data were sampled from undergraduate students. While the younger generation has shown a positive response to CSR initiatives (Cui et al., 2003; Nelson, 2014), it is possible that gamification may be considered an effective tool also for attracting the interest of general audiences. The average male game player is 35 years old while the average female game player is 44 years old (Entertainment Software Association, 2016). These are surprising demographics given that the typical image of game players is that of young people (Kowert, Festl, & Quandt, 2014). Thus, further investigation is needed to examine the impact of CSR gamification on people of all ages.

Another limitation is that the current research used the dichotomy of prominent vs. subtle to manipulate company placement based on general usage of that duality by previous studies. In the literature on product placement in games, alternative types of placements are suggested, including, for example, Yang and Wang's (2009) three key types of game product placement: goal, feedback, and operator. Goal placement aims to associate a product with an objective that players should seek to achieve (e.g., a Big Mac is given after completing a game). Feedback placement uses a product as reinforcement, such as reward and punishment (e.g., a Big Mac is provided when a player clicks a correct target). Operator placement offers a product as a helpful instrument for players (e.g., a Big Mac is fed to give energy to a player's character). The results of that study show that different product goal placements lead to different outcomes, based on where

players direct their attention. Given that greater interaction with brands/products can enhance players' engagement, different types of company placements merit further consideration in future research.

Still another limitation is that the current research explored only one company category, a food retailing company. Prior studies on CSR suggest that brand types influence consumption of CSR-related products/services. For example, Strhilevitz and Myers (1998) showed that CRM campaigns with hedonic or frivolous items were more effective than utilitarian or practical ones since consumers tend to compensate their sense of guilt that results from their consumption of the hedonic/frivolous items. That observation raises these questions: Does the impact of a gamification approach (e.g., a CSR game) on consumer response vary by brand types? For example, in the case of hedonic brands, does a CSR game deepen consumers' feelings of guilt since game play is pleasure-oriented? Or, rather, does the gamification approach create a more synergistic effect since the brand personalities of hedonic products (e.g., exciting) match closely with the gamification approach (that is, the congruence effect of company and communication-media fit)? Those questions offer an interesting topic for future research regarding the impact of brand types and gamification.

The current study used a fictitious company to prevent participants from having had pre-existing experience with an actual company. Prior studies suggest that corporate-customer identification has an impact on consumer response to CSR initiatives (Dutton et al., 1994; Lichtenstein et al., 2004). Furthermore, narratives can increase the identification with a particular character in games. Based on a CSR game, players may have greater identification with a company given that narratives may remind players of the company's CSR activity via a particular character as well as the game play. In that respect, future research may examine how CSR gamification influences consumer

identification with an existing company through CSR game play. Research in that arena may provide further insights for companies on how to manage relationships with consumers.

A CSR "game" is only one of several media tools available to implement a gamification approach. There are alternative new media vehicles by which companies can also interact with consumers for the purpose of communicating CSR-related messages and attracting consumers' participation. In particular, social media has become a key channel for companies to promote their CSR initiatives (Capriotti, 2014; Cone Communications, 2015). Findings by Thom, Millen, and DiMicco (2012) demonstrated that gamification features, such as a points-based incentive system (e.g., badges and points), increased employees' participation in corporate social media (e.g., posting a comment, checking into a location). Thus, an examination of the impact of gamification and CSR-related factors (e.g., CSR storytelling, CSR types) on consumer response via social media also merits future research attention.

A final limitation of this dissertation is that only a short-term outcome of a CSR game was measured. As discussed earlier, that is a challenge commonly experienced by other studies on CSR. The main purpose of a CSR initiative is to maintain a good reputation for a company and to create consumer loyalty over time (Brønn & Vrioni, 2001; Mandhachitara & Poolthong, 2011; White, 2008). As an advergame, a CSR game can be played for an extended period. Therefore, consumers may have frequent opportunities for exposure to a company's CSR initiative, resulting in greater loyalty toward the company (Aarnoutse, Peursum, & Dalpiaz, 2014). For that reason, it will be of value for future research to examine the long-term impact of a CSR game play. Additionally, several interesting variables can be used to measure CSR effectiveness based on actual consumer behavior, such as the number of fruits/vegetables that players

grow, players' frequency in accessing the CSR game, and the period of time they spend playing the CSR game.

Despite those limitations, this dissertation research is expected to provide useful insights on how CSR functions in a new media platform from a theoretical perspective as well as a managerial perspective. From a theoretical perspective, findings from this research add to our understanding of consumer responses to CSR gamification relative to elements in game design and content. In particular, this research demonstrates the effect of gamification in an arena where limited empirical research has been conducted (Hamari et al., 2014). In addition, given that past studies on the effects of game content have focused on games with negative/neutral content, this research sheds light on the relationships between positive game content and consumer response to the game and embedded brands. Furthermore, findings from this research show the interplay between CSR narratives and company placement. Contrary to previous studies, the current research found that prominent placement embedded in a CSR game led to positive evaluations of a company.

From a managerial perspective, this research helps practitioners gauge the impact of CSR gamification and the extent to which it can become a feasible mechanism to improve CSR engagement for social well-being. Basically, the findings showed that CSR narratives enhance consumers' game engagement in ways that led to positive evaluations about the company involved in the game. For those reasons, companies that seek to increase consumer engagement in their CSR initiatives would do well to consider the gamification approach. The approach needs to include a CSR-related narrative as well as a fun interaction to attract and maintain consumer involvement. Findings of this research further suggest that advertisers who are interested in advergame usage as a communication tool should give attention to product placement within the game relative

to game content. Specifically, companies can be bold in the prominent placement of their logos and/or symbols given that high visibility reminds players of positive associations with a social cause that, in turn, may lead to a more positive company evaluation. Finally, to achieve efficacy of narratives, engagement, and product placement, companies are advised to choose a social cause that is well-matched with characteristics of their organizations.

# Appendix A: CSR vs. Self-serving Narratives

## 1. CSR Narrative



More than 15 million children in the U.S. suffer from poverty and hunger. Food Dynamics, a food retailing company in the U.S. started its own corporate social responsibility program to provide these children with nutritious meals. The company also developed a game to inform people of the importance of this issue. In the game, you can grow your own fruits and vegetables by watering, fertilizing, and providing occasional disease control. For each fruit or vegetable you grow and harvest in the game, $10 will be donated by Food Dynamics to buy food for America's hunger children!

## 2. Self-serving Narrative



Food Dynamics is a food retailing company in the U.S. The company's mission is to provide consumers with fresh and nutritious foods. Food Dynamics developed a game to share with its consumers the joy and challenge of growing food. In this game, you can grow your own fruits and vegetables by watering, fertilizing, and providing occasional disease control. For each fruit or vegetable you grow and harvest in the game, 10 points will be deposited into your Farm Bank. Play now and harvest as many fruits and vegetables as you can reach a high score!

# Appendix B: Experimental Procedure



| IRB consent form | ID/PW | Exposure to a stimulus | Read tutorial |

| Pick one of fruits | Grow your own fruit/vegetable | Water it | Provide disease control |

| Fertilize it | Level 2 | Level 3 | Successfully grow your fruit/vegetable |
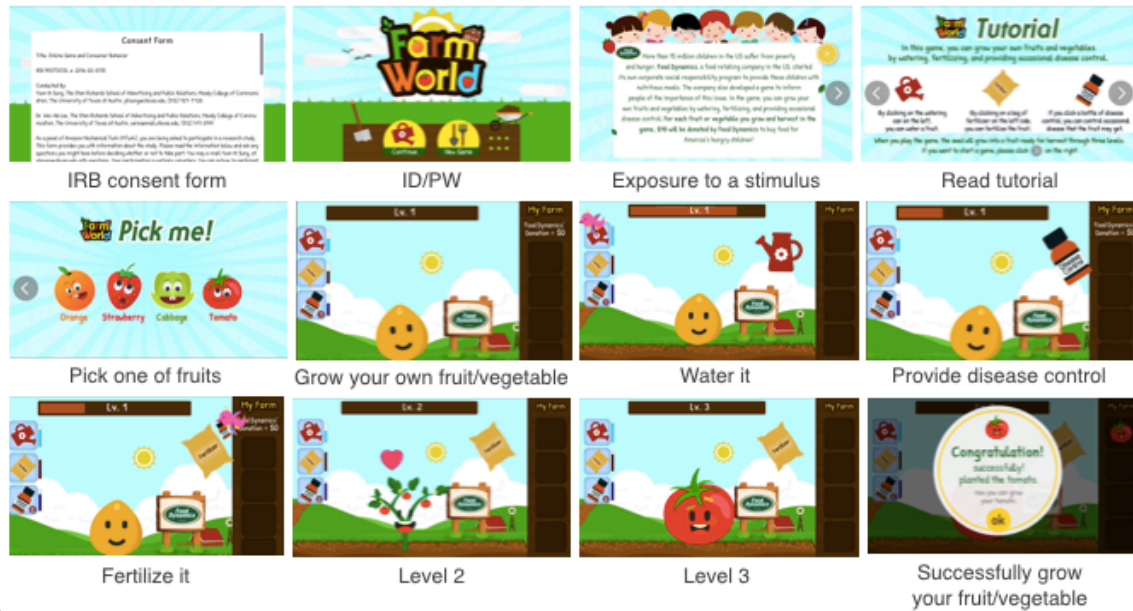
# Appendix C: Manipulation Checks

Below are the items that were used to checks manipulations of narratives and company placement. In terms of narratives, participants were asked to choose the purpose of playing the game among five options. In terms of company placement, items were assessed on a 7-point semantic differential scale.

## 1. Narratives

What would you say is the purpose of playing this game?

1) To grow fruits and vegetables for children's hunger relief.
2) To grow fruits and vegetables to earn points for your Farm Bank and reach a high score.
3) To grow fruits and vegetables to have fun and escape boredom.
4) Not sure.
5) Don't know.

## 2. Company Placement

In the game, the name of the company Food Dynamics was placed _____
(Lee & Faber, 2007; Schneider & Cornwell, 2005; Brennan, Dubas, & Babin, 1999)

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Subtly | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ | ⑥ | ⑦ | Prominently |
| Off to the side | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ | ⑥ | ⑦ | In the center of the action |
| In the background | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ | ⑥ | ⑦ | In a major position in a scene |

# Appendix D: CSR Support

Below are the items that were used to measure CSR support for environment, philanthropy, and employee domains. All items were assessed on a 7-point Likert scale, anchored by (1) "Strongly Disagree" and (7) "Strongly Agree."

**1. Environment** (Mohr & Webb, 2005)

Companies should make every effort to reduce the pollution from their factories.

Companies should use recycled materials in manufacturing new products.

Companies should have factory programs to conserve water and energy.

**2. Philanthropy** (Pérez & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2015)

Companies should regularly make donations to charity.

Companies should have programs to recognize employees for their volunteer work in the community.

Companies should donate some of their products to people in need.

**3. Employee** (Pérez & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2015)

Companies should pay fair salaries to its employees.

Companies should offer safety at work to its employees.

Companies should treat its employees fairly (without discrimination or abuses).

Companies should offer training and career opportunities to its employees.

Companies should offer a pleasant work environment (e.g., flexible hours, conciliation).

# Appendix E: CSR Outcomes

Below are the items that were used to measure CSR outcomes – attitude toward the game, WOM intention toward the game, attitude toward the company, and company evaluation. All items were assessed on a 7-point semantic differential scale.

## 1. Attitude toward the Game

Overall, how do you feel about the game that you've just played? (Nan & Heo, 2007)

| | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ | ⑥ | ⑦ | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Dislike | | | | | | | | Like |
| Negative | | | | | | | | Positive |
| Unfavorable | | | | | | | | Favorable |

## 2. WOM Intention toward the Game

How do you feel about the game? (Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013)

I will ___ this game to people I know.

| | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ | ⑥ | ⑦ | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| talk down | | | | | | | | talk up |

I will bring up this game in a ___ way in conversations I have with friends and acquaintances

| | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ | ⑥ | ⑦ | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| negative | | | | | | | | positive |

I often will speak _____ about this game in social situations.

| | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ | ⑥ | ⑦ | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| unfavorably | | | | | | | | favorably |

### 3. Attitude toward the Company

How do you feel about the company, Food Dynamics? (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006)

| Negative | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ | ⑥ | ⑦ | Positive |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bad | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ | ⑥ | ⑦ | Good |
| Unfavorable | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ | ⑥ | ⑦ | Favorable |

### 4. Company Evaluation

Overall, I think Food Dynamics is … (Forehand & Grier, 2003)

| Bad | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ | ⑥ | ⑦ | Good |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Unhelpful | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ | ⑥ | ⑦ | Helpful |
| Unlikable | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ | ⑥ | ⑦ | Likable |
| Insincere | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ | ⑥ | ⑦ | Sincere |
| Untrustworthy | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ | ⑥ | ⑦ | Trustworthy |
| Not at all involved in community | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ | ⑥ | ⑦ | Very involved in community |
| Doesn't care about customers | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ | ⑥ | ⑦ | Cares very much about customers |

# Appendix F: Additional Measurement

Below are the items that were used to measure fit between the company and the cause and game engagement. All items were assessed on a 7-point Likert scale, anchored by (1) "Strongly Disagree" and (7) "Strongly Agree."

**1. Fit between the Company and the Cause** (Speed & Thompson, 2000)

There is a logical connection between Food Dynamics and its donation to hungry children.

The image of Food Dynamics and the image of donation to hungry children are similar.

Food Dynamics and donation to hungry children fit together well.

Food Dynamics and donation to hungry children stand for similar things.

**2. Game Engagement** (Charlton & Danforth, 2007)

I feel happy at the thought of playing this game.

I would hate to go without playing this game for more than a few days.

When I see this game, I feel drawn towards it.

I tend to want to spend increasing amounts of time playing this game.

It is important to me to be good at this game.

I often experience a buzz of excitement while playing this game.

I like the challenge that learning to play this game presents.

I try to make my play sessions last as long as possible.

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