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THE ROLE OF CSR ON THE FAST FASHION BUSINESS: CONSUMER PERCEPTION AND OUTCOMES

Juliana Andréia Rizzotto

Thesis presented as partial requirement for obtaining the
Master's degree in Information Management

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Advisor: Diego Costa Pinto, Ph.D.

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my Master's thesis to my family and friends, for always supporting me with love and messages of incentive – principally my parents Domingos and Lenir, and my sister Angela, for always encouraging me to follow my dreams. You are my safe harbor, I'm so grateful for having you in my life.

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ABSTRACT

Despite the criticism, the fashion industry is a pioneer in sustainable initiatives. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become a relevant form for companies to achieve various social objectives. However, consumers' perceptions on fast fashion companies' efforts is until now unknown. This research analyzes the consumer's purchase intention through many drivers established in previous literature to be significant to the consumer-company relationship. This study evaluates the relationship between fast fashion industry and some important concepts present in Corporate Social Responsibility studies. The current research adds to the CSR literature by identifying CSR-fit and ethicality as drivers of CSR Authenticity. Authenticity is revealed to be an important predictor of Trust, Social Responsibility, and has an effect on General Attitudes. However, and surprisingly, it does not directly affect purchase intention. Trust appears to be the most important dimension to the CSR framework, significantly impacting Purchase Intention, and Social Responsibility impacts consumer engagement. Consumer engagement and social signaling are also demonstrated to have an impact on purchase intention. Taken together, our CSR framework makes important contributions to understanding consumers' needs and perceptions fulfilled by CSR programs in the fast fashion industry.

KEYWORDS

Corporate Social Responsibility; CSR Authenticity; Fast Fashion; Purchase intention

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction	1
2. Literature review.....	4
2.1. Corporate Social Responsibility.....	4
2.1.1. Sustainability in the Fashion Industry and the Product-Service System (PSS).....	5
2.2. CSR-BRAND FIT	5
2.3. Perceived brand ethicality.....	6
2.4. CSR Authenticity.....	7
2.5. Trust	7
2.6. Company Reputation General Attitude.....	8
2.7. Social responsibility.....	8
2.8. Signaling	8
2.9. Consumer Engagement.....	9
3. Methodology.....	11
3.1. Measures.....	11
3.2. Participants	12
4. Results	14
4.1. Measurement model.....	14
4.2. Structural Model	15
5. Conclusions	19
5.1. Theoretical Implications.....	19
5.2. Social and Practical Implications	22
6. Limitations and recommendations for future work.....	24
7. Bibliography	25
8. APPendix A: Questionnaire	31

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 – Conceptual Model.....	10
Figure 2 – Path coefficients.....	17

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 - Construct Reliability and Validitylity	15
Table 2 - Discriminant Validity	15
Table 3 - Bootstrapping result	16
Table 4 - Bootstrapping result vs Hypotheses	18

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
CE	Consumer Engagement
PSS	Product-service System
PLS-SEM	Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling
CR	Composite Reliability
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
WOM	Word-of-mouth
VIF	Variance inflation factor

1. INTRODUCTION

Sustainable awareness in the fashion industry is growing every day (Brenot et al., 2019; Martínez et al., 2020). The negative impacts of the fashion industry are becoming more transparent, boosted by customers' increased ability to find information online and by non-governmental organizations' efforts to raise awareness about the negative impacts of the textile industry (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017). The garment industry is an important element in the world economy, and demonstrates concern regarding sustainability issues. Nevertheless, many issues have not been addressed satisfactorily (Bubicz et al., 2021). According to Eder-Hansen et al., (2017) apparel and footwear are among the largest industries in the world, with annual revenues of €1.5 trillion. The growing "fast fashion" movement, with multiple collections per year at lower prices (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017). From 2000 to 2014 the fashion consumption has increased by 60% (Remy et al., 2016). In addition, apparel consumption is expected to grow 63% in the coming decade, from 62 million tons to 102 million tons by 2030 (Remy et al., 2016), increasing the environmental concerns and the need for corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs.

The "fast fashion" movement created a new consumption model, providing a huge variety of clothes, cheaper than ever, that consumers easily buy, wear, and discard (Drew & Reichart, 2019). In the past, fashion designers used to create two collections per year, but nowadays stores receive new collections every two or three weeks, representing around 20 collections per year (LeBlanc, 2012). The new clothes' model of production and consumption brings negative impacts, economically, socially, and environmentally (Chan et al., 2020). The apparel supply chain has fragilities, the production process is fragmented and difficult to monitoring, many suppliers are in developing countries, and while companies pressure suppliers to invest in sustainability, they must keep the costs as low as possible (Bubicz et al., 2021). The fashion business currently works in a linear system of production, distribution, and use, in which the production creates considerable impacts, and after being worn or used only a few times, garments are soon discarded. In recent decades around 73% of the clothes are disposed of in landfills or incinerated, and it is estimated that half of the "fast fashion" produced is discarded in less than a year (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017). Every second of every day, a quantity of discarded garments equivalent to the volume of 1.5 Empire State Buildings is burned or sent to a landfill, where it will remain for about 200 years. The annual value of prematurely discarded clothing exceeds \$400 billion. Some of this clothing is utilized only seven to ten times, an issue that could be addressed with advantage by recycling (Drew & Reichart, 2019; Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017). Besides creating a massive amount of refuse and environmental pollution, the fast fashion industry has a very poor track record regarding labor welfare (Chan et al., 2020).

However, even being one of the most polluting industries, the fashion industry is a pioneer in sustainable initiatives. Apparel and footwear manufacturers were among the first organizations to create supplier's conduct codes, in the early 1990s. Today we see many companies introducing sustainable initiatives (Pedersen et al., 2018). Recently, H&M – a fast fashion store – launched a CSR to promote sustainability. The program consists of a monthly subscription whereby the consumers pay a fee and receive a stipulated number of clothes to use for one month, fulfilling the sustainability need in the fashion market and the consumer's personal wish for variety, since one in every seven young consumers consider it undesirable to be photographed more than once in the same outfit (Amed et al., 2018). The demand for variety encouraged by the social media catalyzes the demand for service

models such as rental and pre-owned markets, where the desire for newness addresses the sustainability and extends the product lifetime. Amed et al., (2018) predicted the shift to rental models, with brands adopting rental services such as Express (clients can rent three items for a monthly fee) and the French label Ba&sh (which offers a one-week free rental as a strategy to break into the North American market), and new “rental native” companies created exclusively with rental or subscription models. Stella McCartney launched a program in partnership with The RealReal – a company that sells pre-owned luxury brands by consignment – offering \$100,00 credit to the consumers consigning their products, which makes clients rely on the benefits of the brand as quality and longevity, besides bolstering the CSR of the brand (Amed et al., 2018).

Since the 1960s the concept of CSR has become ever more important and been embraced by firms to achieve various social objectives (J. S. Armstrong & Green, 2013). According to Chu et al. (2020) investment in CSR by big companies is increasing each year, with a dramatic rise between 2016 and 2018. Companies believe that CSR initiatives will be translated into profit and intention to purchase.

According to the literature, the CSR outputs can include economic such as competitive advantage and stock value increase, or non-economic such as corporate visibility, trust, and strong relationship (Ozdora Aksak et al., 2016). Company perceptions regarding CSR outcomes is divided. Some believe in CSR as a long-term business development, while others see it as a competitive advantage in the market (Chan et al., 2020). CSR programs constructed by big fashion companies can be drivers, as an important tool for educating consumers who are not aware of sustainability and fit with the values of aware consumers. According to Kadic-Maglajlic et al. (2019) CSR should include activities that allow people to engage and participate actively in sustainable consumption. However, it is difficult to define CSR, mostly because what is seen as CSR for one might not be for others. Much research has been undertaken seeking a global definition (J. S. Armstrong & Green, 2013). Furthermore, clients do not accept CSR programs blindly, and a lack of fit between CSR initiatives and the brand can doom a CSR campaign to failure (Chuah et al., 2020).

Some companies have met with CSR success and others have not. Avon in China carried out a program to combat breast cancer, providing free services to Chinese women, and it was a tremendous success reflected in the social media. However, Chinese Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) proposed a program focused on research in food, nutrition, and health, but consumers did not engage. Both programs were based on social projects, but had two different outcomes (Deng & Xu, 2017). Patagonia had the most profitable year in 2015 when launching their WornWear Program, incorporating textile recycling technologies into product production (Leal Filho et al., 2019). Fashion companies are not equally likely to engage in CSR programs. Well-known companies operating in high-profile segments tend to suffer more pressure to engage in social and environmental issues (Colucci et al., 2020).

Thus, it is important to understand how the consumers react toward CSR in the fast fashion market and to identify how to launch a successful CSR program. Previous research demonstrates the possibility of creating a successful framework between ethical and luxury brands, for example, something that was previously considered unlikely (Costa Pinto et al., 2019).

Nowadays, most parts of CSR programs are launched on the brand’s social media, which provide interaction between consumer and brand, pushing companies to new levels of openness and transparency (Chu et al., 2020). Marketers are called upon to attend to the new era – the era of engagement (Obilo et al., 2020). Companies that are able to understand and fulfill consumers’

expectations about CSR programs have an advantage over competitors that cannot. However, the literature linking this supply and demand is scarce (Kuokkanen & Sun, 2020).

To fill this gap, this study evaluates, through empirical research, the CSR topics and identifies a CSR framework capable of connecting the CSR program to the consumer purchase intention. The current research is based on H&M's recent program, deepening the consumers' perspective toward CSR program and creating a strong relationship between companies and customers. The current research also contributes to expanding the literature toward CSR in the fast fashion business. The findings contribute to understanding consumers' perceptions of CSR programs launched in the fast fashion industry, providing information to develop marketing strategies to enhance consumers' engagement and develop successful CSR programs.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

The business literature is changing. Until recently the focus has been on market sustainability, but has now expanded to social and environmental sustainability. Many new business models and concepts have emerged in the market, seeking to increase the benefits to the business community and society, among them a practice already known, CSR (Pedersen et al., 2018). Companies from different markets invest billions of dollars annually in CSR programs as an innovative way to improve consumers' brand perception and attitudes (Costa Pinto et al., 2019).

According to Pedersen et al. (2018) the inclusion of corporate sustainability in the conventional business model needs to move from a making-money perspective to a triple bottom line, creating economic, social, and environmental value. This movement is not easy. As there are many different definitions of CSR program, and the vision can differ from client to client (J. S. Armstrong & Green, 2013; Chan et al., 2020). Many of the consumers are skeptical about CSR programs, which calls for a deep and clear communication plan for launching the CSR program (Chuah et al., 2020).

There are two contrasting views about CSR regulation and how it should work. One side believes that regulation should be done through government incentive and penalties for a firm's poor practices (J. S. Armstrong & Green, 2013). However, there is another view that believes firms should be free to develop their own guidance, which asks them to be in contact with the stakeholders such as the communities and customers, in order to find common agreement. This view seems to be more interesting regarding the firms' long-term profits, creating a relationship of trust with the consumer through real information about the features and capacities of the product and the company, preventing possible misunderstanding and harm (J. S. Armstrong & Green, 2013).

Even in a case reported where there were regulations in place and companies were penalized for not following the rules, the reputational losses were more than seven-times larger than the fines paid to the government, reinforcing the belief that self-monitoring and self-correcting of the market can be more powerful than government regulation (J. S. Armstrong & Green, 2013). This clearly demonstrates the power and the importance of consumers' perceptions, justifying research in order to explore the consumer perspective. In addition, consumers are taking into consideration the environmental and societal aspects in their consumption decisions (Chuah et al., 2020). The literature on corporate responsibility and sustainability describes many internal and external benefits promoted by the social and environmental initiatives, such as image enhancement, and reduced risk of lawsuits (Pedersen et al., 2018).

Purchase intention is one of the desirable outcomes generated by CSR. Kang & Hustvedt (2014) identified an indirect relationship between social responsibility and purchase intention. Schramm-Klein et al. (2016) showed that CSR programs affect consumer behavior positively and are maintained in order to influence long-term consumer purchasing behavior. It is necessary to create a communication strategy that highlights the relevance of CSR programs to the firm's core business and the consumer's value (Chuah et al., 2020). The popularity of CSR programs in big companies and the importance of the connection between the company and the society are undeniable, but we cannot reject how diverse and complex the process is of the acceptance of this program as authentic. It is

necessary to study in depth the aspects of CSR programs that influence purchase intention among customers.

2.1.1. Sustainability in the Fashion Industry and the Product-Service System (PSS)

Sustainability in the fashion business is an urgent issue that is needed to minimize damage to the environment, society, and economy. The Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2017) proposes and discusses a new textile economy based on a circular economy whereby clothes are made and used in different ways – causing less damage in their production, being used more times, and after use re-entering the economy – and thus never finish as waste. Many fashion companies have introduced sustainable strategies, such as new textile fibers, new revenue channels (e.g., leasing, take-back, resell, reuse, and recycling programs) involving well-known brands including Marks & Spencer, Patagonia, Levis, Bestseller, and H&M (Pedersen et al., 2018).

For some time, the principal sustainable strategy adopted was to produce with less impact, but with the vast amount of clothing purchased and disposed of, this strategy progressively failed to work as expected (Becker-Leifhold & Iran, 2018). Within the sustainability alternatives to minimize the environmental impacts, reuse is the most preferred. Many studies using different perspectives have obtained the same reliable results, and conclude for the benefits of reuse (Farrant et al., 2010; Fortuna & Diyamandoglu, 2017; Sandin & Peters, 2018; Woolridge et al., 2006).

Reusing and recycling the garment reduces not only the waste and the environmental impact, but generates economic benefit. A benefit of €1.8 trillion by 2030 is estimated if Europe adopts a circular economy, bringing benefits to the environment, society, and economy – creating new work opportunities and reducing the cost with the resources (Ellen MacArthur Foundation & McKinsey, 2015).

Tukker & Tischner (2006, p. 1552) conceptualized the product-service system (PSS), which *“consists of a mix of tangible products and intangible services designed and combined so that they jointly are capable of fulfilling final customer needs”*. The product service-system (PSS) can be the innovative business model to help the garment industry promote environment-friendly actions (C. M. Armstrong et al., 2015), taking into consideration the variety of categories of PSS, including product maintenance, take-back schemes, product renting and sharing, and the sustainability potential derived from reducing landfill waste and increasing product longevity (Tukker & Tischner, 2006). PSS is an option by which companies can adopt a sustainable business model.

Many companies already utilize the PSS system through rental schemes practiced by wardrobe libraries, where consumers rent clothes for a pre-defined time. Well-established companies are implementing rental programs. According to C. M. Armstrong et al. (2015) the development of clothing-related PSS programs tends to be more successful when implemented by well-known brands.

2.2. CSR-BRAND FIT

CSR-brand fit is the association/link between the company core business – product, brand image, position – and the CSR program (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006). A high fit program means that the CSR program is aligned with the brand image as a whole. The benefits of the CSR-fit in the role of CSR were discussed at length, with pro and con results (Kuokkanen & Sun, 2020).

Studies demonstrate that a fit program provides a perception of CSR authenticity, and a positive fit emerges when it is aligned with the firm's offering, brand concept, or target market needs (Alhouti et al., 2016). Ellen et al. (2006) argue that high fit programs make it easy for the client to understand the program as a "typical" business strategy model, and create the perception of a genuine program guided by value-driven motives, while low fit programs might be viewed as a reaction to the pressure of stakeholders or the market.

Becker-Olsen et al. (2006) identified that low-fit creates a negative impact on consumers' beliefs, attitudes, and intentions. However, the same is identified in high-fit programs in which the company shares some of its profits (e.g., charitable donations).

In accordance with previous research, Deng & Xu (2017) identified influences of CSR on customer intention to recommend and purchase, and this relationship is mediated by fit. A perceived good fit is desired especially by the baby boomer¹ generation (Kuokkanen & Sun, 2020).

Kuokkanen & Sun (2020), however, bring a new perspective on this subject. Their study demonstrates that fit is not important to consumers as a choice criterion. Taking into consideration the previous studies supporting the importance of fit, Kuokkanen & Sun (2020) believe that instead of simply ignoring the fit characteristic it is an important incentive for more studies before dismissing CSR-fit as a strategy. The authors propose the need for a macro view about CSR-fit and the peculiarity of each program.

2.3. PERCEIVED BRAND ETHICALITY

CSR is characterized in the literature by an organizational performance with a view to certain dimensions such as economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary (i.e., Carroll 1991, 1979), or economic, ethical, legal, and philanthropic (Grohmann & Bodur, 2015), identifying ethicality as a dimension of CSR. Consumers identify CSR as a service provider of economic, ethical/legal, and philanthropic dimensions, in a second-order structure (Grohmann & Bodur, 2015). In an organizational view, CSR utilizes ethical, social, and responsible actions to provide company effectiveness and financial outcomes (Grohmann & Bodur, 2015).

Taking into consideration the importance of the ethical dimension to CSR, Brunk (2010) undertook to identify the consumer-perceived ethicality, identifying the principal attributes to classify a company as ethical/unethical. Participants in Brunk's study demonstrated a critical stance toward the companies' advertising when identified as immoral or not true, (taking advantage of weak and vulnerable persons, being misleading or false about the product characteristics). Another high priority element identified was environmental issues, in which participants already boycotted or have the intention of boycotting companies contributing to industrial disasters (e.g., oil spills), as well as the exploitation of labor in overseas countries, usually in underdeveloped countries. Brunk (2010) extended the concept of ethical issues impacting the companies and identified six domains: consumers, employees, the environment, the overseas community, the local economy and community, and the business community.

After a broad analysis of consumer perceived ethicality, it is time now to investigate the peculiarities among markets. Costa Pinto et al. (2019) identified low consumers' perceived brand

¹ A baby boomer is defined as a person born from 1946 to 1964.

ethicality toward luxury brands. Both luxury brands and fast fashion companies are self-enhancing undertakings, and it is important to identify the consumer perception of ethicality toward fast fashion companies.

2.4. CSR AUTHENTICITY

Alhouti et al. (2016) identified CSR Authenticity as an important mediator on consumer outcomes, highlighting the importance for a company to not only engage in CSR programs, but to take into account the consumer perception about its authenticity.

Many companies have launched CSR programs in order to be socially responsible, but this does not mean that consumers view them as socially responsible. Skepticism regarding CSR programs is high among consumers, especially because many of the programs have contradictory actions, creating campaigns against cancer but selling products with ingredients that cause cancer, for example (Alhouti et al., 2016).

There is a relationship between authenticity and CSR-fit. Alhouti et al. (2016) identified that consumers perceive CSR programs as authentic when the action aligns with the sales; in other words, a CSR program is seen as inauthentic when the company sells products that are harmful to the causes it promotes, although Alhouti et al. (2016) identify CSR authenticity as a driver of the consumer's purchase intention .

2.5. TRUST

One of the risks to the acceptance of CSR programs is the skepticism about the information promulgated by the companies. The recent growing interest of consumers for green products has generated a massive promotion of green options in the market. However, 98% of the advertisement has elements considered as greenwashing², resulting in consumers' disappointment, and increasing the consumer-perceived risk (Martínez et al., 2020).

Chen (2010, p. 309), defined Green Trust as *“a willingness to depend on a product, service, or brand based on the belief or expectation resulting from its credibility, benevolence, and ability about its environmental performance”*. According to Kang & Hustvedt (2014), brand trust is derived from two elements, the brand reliability – the belief that the brand will satisfy consumers' needs – and brand intentions – the consumer belief that the brand's actions are to satisfy consumers' interest or welfare. Kang & Hustvedt (2014) identified trust as a critical component to enhance the consumer's purchase intention and positive word-of-mouth (WOM). While Kang & Hustvedt (2014) identified trust as a direct predictor of purchase intention, except among Chinese consumers, trust is an important and direct predictor of corporate evaluation, subsequently translating into a positive attitude toward the company and purchase, featuring trust as a mediator of purchase intention (Tian et al., 2011).

² The term greenwashing emerged to characterize abusive and exaggerated acts claiming for sustainability, when in fact the real aim is to gain market share. Thus, greenwashing can be considered the act of misleading the consumer about the company's environmental programs or products/ services (Martinez et al., 2020).

Trust may be considered as a valuable predictor of consumer intentions toward ethical behavior (Kang & Hustvedt, 2014). A lack of green trust could be harmful to CSR programs (Chuah et al., 2020).

2.6. COMPANY REPUTATION GENERAL ATTITUDE

Company reputation is a key element in differentiation, important to competitiveness in the market at this moment. Creating or repairing a company's reputation is a key to success (Ellen et al., 2006). Kim & Ferguson (2019) suggested that the company reputation influences the framing of CSR programs, and that high-fit initiatives from companies with poor reputations earn less support from stakeholders to the CSR program than the low-fit. Even more, the stakeholders utilize company reputation as a reference to evaluate the CSR activities. The peculiarity of the fast fashion market and the lack of information about the performance of Fast Fashion toward CSR programs call for an investigation of consumer perception and can bring important insights to the literature.

Through the general attitude measure, it is possible to understand the consumers' general opinion about a company or its products. General attitudes and trust directly affect purchase intention (Kang & Hustvedt, 2014). Corporate reputation is one of the mediators between CSR and organizational outcomes, and for this reason, management scholars are paying attention to it (Agarwal et al., 2015).

2.7. SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Strategically, corporate social responsibility can bring great social progress. However, most companies have not adopted CSR voluntarily, some facing boycotts by consumers after the media exposed unethical practices (e.g. the boycott suffered by Nike for practicing abusive labor). Companies started to announce social programs, charity, volunteer hours, information about carbon emissions, waste, and more. This movement creates the necessity of studying and understanding the impact of social responsibility on consumers' perceptions (Porter & Mark R. Kramer, 2006).

Studies support that consumers are aware of such matters and support companies that promote social responsibility. However, the impact of consumers' opinions about social responsibility should be considered with the general attitudes about the company (Kang & Hustvedt, 2014). Consumers often utilize the power of consumption (e.g., boycotts) to drive corporations and society into ethical and social impacts (Johnson & Chattaraman, 2019). Kang & Hustvedt (2014) identified social responsibility as an indirect predictor of behavioral intentions.

2.8. SIGNALING

Bennett & Chakravarti (2009) demonstrated that products involved in any kind of CSR program generally have more acceptance by the consumers, regardless of the specific motivations that drive the decision to purchase. Analyzing the consumers' motivations that drive their decision to purchase CSR-associated products Bennett & Chakravarti (2009) identified two reasons. First, these products bring high visibility, and consumers like this, generating social signaling regarding their own benevolence. Second, the self-signaling associated with the products brings satisfaction to the consumers.

The individual believes that peers, family, and/or friends expect them to perform in a specific way. It is about the importance given to the others' opinions in relation to the adoption of a specific behavior (Lang & Armstrong, 2018). According to previous studies, Bennett & Chakravarti (2009) confirmed the potential of signaling to boost the consumer's interest in products CSR-associated.

2.9. CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT

The internet brings new forms of communication and interaction between brands and consumers and between consumers, which is empowered by social media. Recent studies show customer engagement to be an important marketing outcome, with a potential audience of almost 50% of the global population, once they become present in the social media (de Oliveira Santini et al., 2020).

Companies' investment in digital marketing is growing and is expected to increase even further. However, the big challenge to the companies still is to convert social media investments into meaningful customer engagement (de Oliveira Santini et al., 2020). De Oliveira Santini et al. (2020) synthesized previous studies toward customer engagement through meta-analysis, identifying behavior intention as an important outcome. Customer engagement demonstrated value to the company by impacting firm performance, word-of-mouth, and behavioral intention. Supporting companies' investments in customer engagement.

Although customer engagement is becoming each day more important and the amount of research is increasing, there is little consensus about engagement conceptualization and measures (de Oliveira Santini et al., 2020; Obilo et al., 2020). De Oliveira Santini et al (2020) analyzed the literature and identified at least eight different scales of measure. Regarding the conceptualization, four main perspectives are identified: intrinsic motivation (desire to interact and cooperate with the community members), psychological mind state (consumers recognize important brands as a part of their self-concept), customer activities (customer activities in the social media, as interaction and intention to give online recommendations). and contributions to the firms (improve the firms' performance encouraging direct and indirect contributions).

We are considering the behavioral perspective of the consumers' engagement, and the concept of engagement developed by Obilo et al. (2020, p.636): *"Consumers' positive and negative behavioral interactions with a brand and all its constituent elements (brand content, other consumers, etc.), beyond simple transactions, that result from their interest in and commitment to the brand"*.

Considering the theoretical background presented above, it is possible to affirm that the framework of CSR is under constant construction. The outcomes vary according to the market and even change in different analyses over the years. Our study brings a relatively new scenario, a CSR program adopted by a fast fashion brand – a controversial proposal at first glance, but a necessary change to follow the changes faced by the market.

We analyzed the literature and propose a conceptual model (Figure 1) as a framework of CSR, and formulate four hypotheses, with the goal of revealing a new perspective of the CSR role and contributing to the literature of CSR programs.

The CSR fit brings the perception of doing well, as the company is utilizing its know-how applied to the CSR, creating a perception of an authentic program. Another predictor of authenticity is

consumer ethicality. If the consumer believes the company is ethical, the perception of CSR as authentic is greater. We consider that CSR authenticity is driven by fit and perceived ethicality.

H1: CSR-Fit (a) and Ethicality (b) drive CSR Authenticity.

We consider CSR authenticity as a base of the CSR program, impacting positively many other dimensions such as social responsibility, general attitude, customer engagement, and purchase intention.

H2: CSR Authenticity affects positively Social Responsibility (a), General attitude (b), Customer Engagement (c), Trust (d), and Purchase Intention (e).

We believe that purchase intention is affected by various dimensions such as customer engagement, trust, social signaling, and social responsibility.

H3: Customer engagement (a), Trust (b), and Social Signaling (c) drive Purchase Intention.

H4: Social Responsibility drives Customer Engagement (a) and Purchase Intention (b).

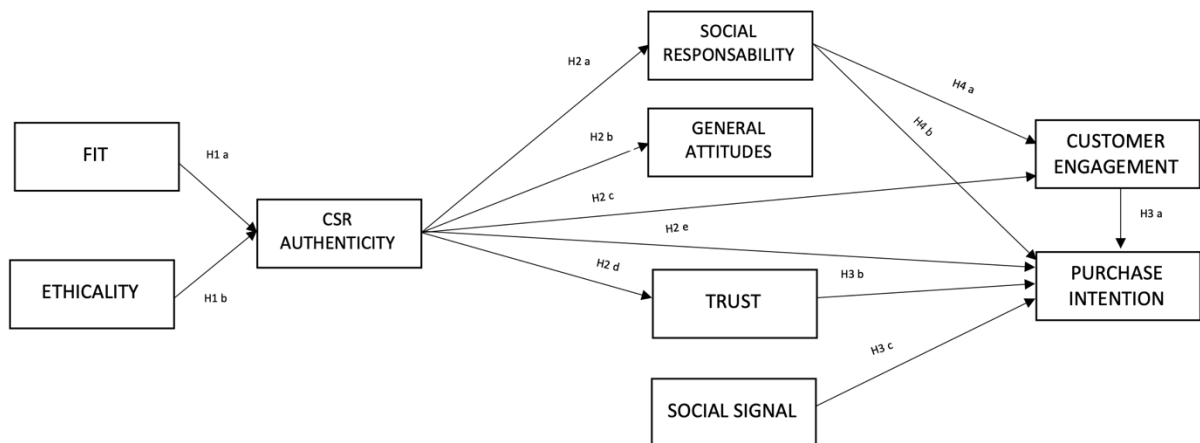


Figure 1 – Conceptual Model

3. METHODOLOGY

To empirically test the proposed model and hypothesized relationships, we developed quantitative research through an online survey. The questionnaire was pretested by individuals from diverse backgrounds, to ensure understanding of questions by all participants. We employed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to test the research hypotheses, utilizing the software Smart PLS.

3.1. MEASURES

This study investigates consumers' perceptions of CSR programs on the fast fashion business and its outcomes. The measures of our variables are adapted from research that is well-established in the literature. The measures were validated before the questionnaire's application. The questionnaire items were measured on a scale from 1 to 9, from (1) 'strongly disagree' to (9) 'strongly agree'. This research addresses 9 dimensions: CSR-fit, Ethicality, Corporate Social Responsibility, Authenticity, Trust, Purchase Intention, Consumer Engagement, General Attitudes, and Social Signaling.

Demographics metrics were utilized to identify, gender, age, and country of residence. Respondents were able to respond if they were female, male, or preferred not to respond. Regarding age, they could answer from 18 to 70. Respondents were provided with a list of countries where H&M have stores. Respondents who chose other countries were eliminated from the analysis.

To validate the Customer Engagement scale, respondents were asked if they use Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter, or none of them, with multiple responses allowed, adapted from Obilo et al. (2020). Respondents who selected "none of them" were eliminated, as they were not able to evaluate the CE scale.

To present the CSR program to the participants, at the beginning of the questionnaire was the following statement: "The fast fashion store H&M launched a Corporate Social Responsibility program to promote sustainability. The program consists of a monthly subscription, where the consumers pay a fee and can get a stipulated number of clothes to use for a month. Taking into consideration the H&M Corporate Social Responsibility program, to what extent do you agree with the statement below:"

The CSR-fit scale utilized, following Deng & Xu (2017), a scale from Ellen et al. (2006), composed of three items: "The CSR behavior of H&M fits with its business", "The CSR behavior of H&M is relevant to its business", "The CSR behavior of H&M is appropriate for its brand image".

The Corporate Social Responsibility Authenticity scale was adapted from Alhouti et al. (2016) and utilized six items: "The company CSR action is genuine", "This CSR action makes the company unique to me", "This CSR action is in accordance with the company's value and beliefs", "The company is standing up for what it believes in", "The company is a socially responsible company", "The company is concerned about improving the well-being of society".

The Trust scale was based on Kang & Hustvedt (2014), utilizing a scale from Erdem & Swait (2004), and utilized five items to measure it: "H&M does not pretend to be something it isn't", "H&M's CSR program claims are believable", "Over time, my experiences with H&M have led me to expect it

to keep its promises, no more and no less”, “H&M has a name you can trust”, “H&M delivers what it promises”.

The Purchase intention scale utilized, from Tian et al. (2011), followed a scale from Berens et al. (2005), and comprised three items: “If I am planning to buy a service of this type, I will choose this service”, “There is a great possibility that I will buy this service”, “I am willing to pay a little more for this service”.

The general attitude was based on Kang & Hustvedt (2014), utilizing scales designed by Sengupta & Johar (2002). It had three items to measure the general attitude: “I think H&M is a very good brand”, “I think H&M is a very useful brand”, “My opinion of the H&M is very favorable”.

Social responsibility was based on Kang & Hustvedt (2014), utilizing scales designed by Lichtenstein et al. (2004). Five items measured social responsibility: “H&M is committed to using a portion of its profits to help nonprofits”, “H&M gives back to the communities in which it does business”, “Local nonprofits benefit from H&M’s contributions”, “H&M integrates charitable contributions into its business activities”, “H&M is interested in corporate giving”.

Perceived brand ethicality came from Costa Pinto et al. (2019), utilizing a scale from Grohmann & Bodur (2015). Four items were used to identify the perceived brand ethicality: “I believe this company is ethical”, “I believe this company brand is socially responsible”, “I believe this company brand is socially conscious”, “I believe this company brand is sustainable”.

The Consumer engagement scale was drawn from S. Kim (2019) and comprised three items: “I have been participating in H&M’s CSR activities”, “I have been engaging in the company’s CSR activities”, and “I have been interacting with the company to support its CSR activities”.

The signaling scale was composed of social signaling and self-signaling referring to consumption reduction and environmental concern, utilizing scales designed by Johnson & Chattaraman (2019). It used five items to measure the social signaling: “I purchase products from companies that are helpful to the global community”, “I purchase products from companies that respect the environment”, “I purchase from companies that have ethical practices toward their employees and environment”, “I buy products from companies that are well known for their socially responsible efforts”, “I support causes that are socially responsible”.

3.2. PARTICIPANTS

Three hundred forty-five participants demonstrated interest in participating in the online survey and started to respond. However, some of the participants left the questionnaire before finishing it. Taking into consideration that the participants were volunteers and had no obligation to complete it, and the theme was very specific, we believe some of them lost their interest and left the questionnaire before complete. After applying filters, as 100% of the survey concluded, 220 questionnaires were considered valid for the study.

The participants were 118 female, 100 male and 2 other/prefer not to say. The education level was mostly (64%) undergraduate degree and graduate degree (BA/BSc; MA/MSc/MPhil/), followed by high school (16%) and secondary and technical (16%) and doctoral degree (4%). Participants from 24 countries were identified, the most part from Portugal (35%) followed by the United Kingdom

(18%), Poland (17%), Italy (6%), USA (4%), Australia (3%) and others. The age of participants was 27% between 21 and 25 years old, 25% between 26 and 30 years old, 24% between 31 and 35 years old, 14% between 18 and 20 years old, and 10% between 36 and 40 years old, the maximum age of participants it was 53 years old. Regarding social media the most indicated was Facebook, followed by Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn (participants could choose more than one social media).

The research was developed first through the consent to participate, second by the demographic's questionnaire, and third by the filters of restricting participants to users of social media and residents of countries where H&M is present. This was followed by the phase of testing the research hypotheses' dimensions.

4. RESULTS

The questionnaire was applied through Qualtrics, the response data from the survey were exported to SPSS® to be organized and formatted, and the question about scarcity was reversed.

The sample size is important in assuring the statistical results. Some research utilizes the rule that the sample size should be 10 times the number of formative indicators used to measure a single construct, or the largest number of structural paths directed at a particular construct in a structural model (Joseph F. Hair et al., 2017). Cohen (1992) assumes a complex sample size based on a level of statistical power of 80% utilizing PLS-SEM (Joseph F. Hair et al., 2017). Considering that the current research has a maximum number of arrows pointing to a construct of 7, the minimum size of the sample should be 188 participants. We have 220 validated answers, and a R^2 value of at least 0.10 with 1% of error is expected.

To evaluate the hypotheses the Structural Equations Model (SEM) was employed, since SEM becomes the principal tool for measuring survey-based research (Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015), using Partial Least Square Structural Equations Modeling (PLS-SEM). PLS-SEM is indicated and widely employed in marketing research (Hair et al., 2017) and is considered the most promising analytical tool to have emerged in the past decade (Manley et al., 2020).

PLS-SEM examines simultaneously the relationship between multi-item latent variables. Moreover, PLS-SEM demonstrates superiority to other analysis methods on mediation factors – a third variable that may facilitate the relationship between variables (Manley et al., 2020).

Furthermore, PLS-SEM is appropriate in any context in which the prediction is the primary statistical objective of the research, it is exploratory research to develop or extend theory, it seeks causal relationships, and the research focuses on small population samples (Manley et al., 2020).

The application of PLS-SEM proceeded in two steps: (1) measurement model, to evaluate the reliability and validation, (2) the structural model to test the hypotheses (Manley et al., 2020).

4.1. MEASUREMENT MODEL

The measurement model was analyzed by three indicators, reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity.

The reliability of the construct was measured by Cronbach's alpha (α) and composite reliability (CR). For exploratory research values between 0.6 and 0.7 or above are acceptable (Hair et al., 2020).

The convergent validity was measured by the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), obtained by averaging the indicators of reliabilities. The value of AVE needs to be 0.5 or higher. These metrics measure the variance shared by the construct and its individual indicators (Hair et al., 2020).

Analyzing the convergent validity and reliability, we identified indicators with AVE lower than 0.70, and following Joseph F. Hair et al. (2017), they were removed. Table 2 shows the Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted for the measurement items.

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
C. Engagment	0.953	0.970	0.914
CSR Authenticity	0.921	0.939	0.719
Ethicality	0.955	0.967	0.880
Fit	0.794	0.878	0.706
Gen Attitudes	0.905	0.940	0.840
Purchase Intention	0.920	0.950	0.863
Social Signal	0.944	0.957	0.818
Social responsibility	0.937	0.952	0.800
Trust	0.911	0.934	0.739

Table 1 - Construct Reliability and Validity

The discriminant validity was measured by the Fornell-Larcker criterion, this metric compares the square root of the AVE values with latent variable correlations. The square root of each construct's AVE needs to be higher than the other correlations (Joseph F. Hair et al., 2017). Table 3 presents the discriminant validity.

	CEngagment	CSR Authenticity	Ethicality	Fit	Gen Attitudes	Purchase Int.	Social Signal	Social resp.	Trust
C. Engagment	0.956								
CSR Authenticity	0.387	0.848							
Ethicality	0.389	0.837	0.938						
Fit	0.202	0.612	0.465	0.840					
Gen Attitudes	0.337	0.714	0.782	0.438	0.916				
Purchase Intention	0.461	0.632	0.639	0.417	0.581	0.929			
Social Signal	0.139	0.305	0.202	0.353	0.214	0.320	0.904		
Social Responsibility	0.470	0.713	0.806	0.405	0.692	0.649	0.212	0.894	
Trust	0.304	0.789	0.791	0.500	0.764	0.634	0.240	0.716	0.859

Table 2 - Discriminant Validity

4.2. STRUCTURAL MODEL

The first indicator analyzed was the collinearity statistic through the Variance inflation factor (VIF) indicator. The inner VIF values were below the threshold of five, indicating that the structural model is not a critical issue. The analyses of the structural model were conducted by bootstrapping, to check the relationship between hypothesis and construct. It was calculated through bootstrapping with 5000 bootstrap samples, as recommended by Joseph F. Hair et al. (2017). After running the bootstrapping, we analyzed the report and identified the mean values, t and p. To be statistically

significant the student t value should be over 1.96 (significance level of 5% in a two-tailed test) and $p < 0.05$ to establish a significant outer weight (Joseph F. Hair et al., 2017).

Table 4 presents the results of bootstrapping, applied in our constructs and rejecting the relationship between CSR Authenticity and C. Engagement; CSR Authenticity and Purchase Intention; CSR Authenticity and Self Signal, General Attitudes and Purchase intention; Self Signal and Purchase intention with t statistics under 1.96 (Joseph F. Hair et al., 2017).

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics	P Values
CEngagement -> Purchase Intention	0.188	0.187	0.049	3.814	0.000
CSR Authenticity -> CEngagement	0.105	0.106	0.080	1.325	0.185
CSR Authenticity -> Gen Attitudes	0.714	0.715	0.035	20.401	0.00
CSR Authenticity -> Purchase Intention	0.117	0.121	0.092	1.269	0.204
CSR Authenticity -> Social responsibility	0.713	0.714	0.035	20.557	0.000
CSR Authenticity -> Trust	0.789	0.789	0.0278	28.473	0.000
Ethicality -> CSR Authenticity	0.704	0.704	0.031	22.494	0.000
Fit -> CSR Authenticity	0.285	0.286	0.042	6.848	0.000
Social Signal -> Purchase Intention	0.156	0.156	0.052	3.001	0.003
Social responsibility -> CEngagement	0.395	0.395	0.078	5.038	0.000
Social responsibility -> Purchase Intention	0.231	0.230	0.086	2.683	0.007
Trust -> Purchase Intention	0.232	0.227	0.105	2.200	0.028

Table 3 - Bootstrapping result

According to the R^2 values of the endogenous latent variables in the path model, we identified SCR Authenticity as a respective construct with R^2 value over 0.76, Trust, Purchase intention, General attitude, and Social Responsibility as moderate, with R^2 value over 0.50. See the matrix with R^2 and path coefficient.

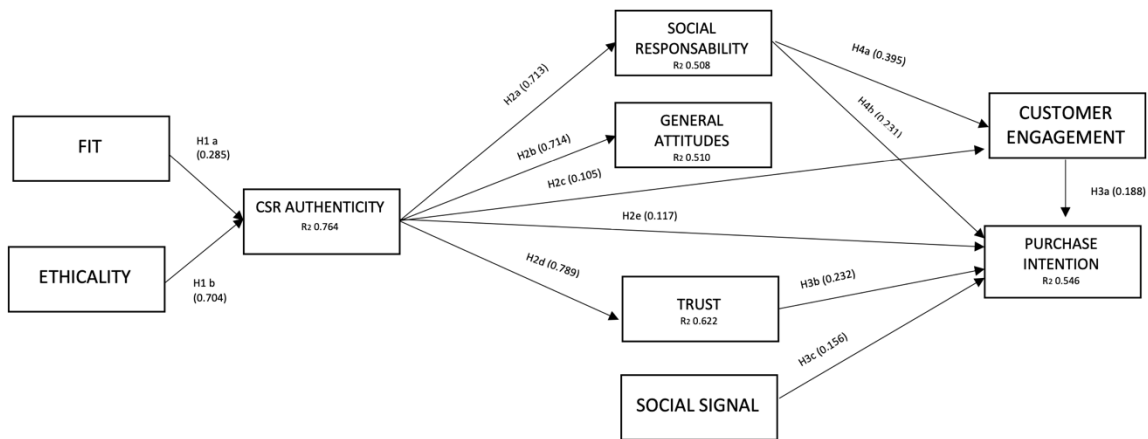


Figure 2 – Path coefficients

Analyzing the hypotheses and the T statistics, we determine that the H1(a) Fit influences CSR Authenticity, H1(b) Ethicality influences CSR Authenticity, H2(a) CSR Authenticity affects Social Responsibility, H2(b) CSR Authenticity affects Gen Attitudes, H2(d) CSR Authenticity affects Trust, H3(a) C. Engagement affects consumer’s Purchase Intention, H3(b) Trust influences Purchase Intention, H3(c) Social Signaling influences Purchase Intention, H4(a) Social Responsibility influences C. Engagement, and H4(b) Social Responsibility influences Purchase Intention. However, the hypotheses H2(c) CSR Authenticity affecting C. Engagement and H2(e) CSR Authenticity affecting Purchase Intention were not supported, demonstrating that CSR Authenticity is a predictor but does not directly affect C. Engagement and Purchase Intention. Detailed below in Table 5.

According to the path coefficients, CSR Authenticity and Trust have the strongest connection, followed by CSR Authenticity affecting Gen Attitude and Social Responsibility and Ethicality as a predictor of CSR Authenticity.

	T Statistics	P Values	Path coefficient	Hypotheses	Result
Fit -> CSR Authenticity	6.848	0.00	0.285	H1 (a)	<i>supported</i>
Ethicality -> CSR Authenticity	22.494	0.00	0.704	H1 (b)	<i>supported</i>
CSR Authenticity -> Social responsibility	20.557	0.00	0.713	H2 (a)	<i>supported</i>
CSR Authenticity -> Gen Attitudes	20.401	0.00	0.714	H2 (b)	<i>supported</i>
CSR Authenticity -> CEngagement	1.325	0.185	0.105	H2 (c)	<i>not supported</i>
CSR Authenticity -> Trust	28.473	0.00	0.789	H2 (d)	<i>supported</i>
CSR Authenticity -> Purchase Intention	1.269	0.204	0.117	H2 (e)	<i>not supported</i>
CEngagement -> Purchase Intention	3.814	0.00	0.188	H3(a)	<i>supported</i>
Trust -> Purchase Intention	2.200	0.028	0.232	H3 (b)	<i>supported</i>
Social Signal -> Purchase Intention	3.001	0.003	0.156	H3 (c)	<i>supported</i>
Social responsibility -> CEngagement	5.038	0.00	0.395	H4 (a)	<i>supported</i>
Social responsibility -> Purchase Intention	2.683	0.007	0.231	H4 (b)	<i>supported</i>

Table 4 - Bootstrapping result vs Hypotheses

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1. THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

Empirical research provides in-depth knowledge about any area through the test of hypotheses. The efforts employed in the present research tested several variables from the literature to better understand the consumer relationship with corporate social responsibility, its drivers, and the purchase intention.

Due to the degradation of the environment, youth are changing the collective conscience from self-centered to society-centered (Diddi et al., 2019). As a consequence, companies are investing even more in corporate social responsibility, to be aligned with consumers' principles and to create marketing differentiation (J. S. Armstrong & Green, 2013; Chuah et al., 2020). This research demonstrates Trust and Social responsibility to be drivers of purchase intention. This is an important outcome, especially when taking into consideration that the company of study is a fast fashion.

Our results suggest that CSR-Fit and Ethicality are drivers of CSR Authenticity, supporting our first hypothesis. One of the most debated and contradictory findings in the CSR literature – the CSR-fit – is supported by our research, demonstrating the importance of the company's core business aligned with the CSR program to be perceived as authentic by consumers. Supporting the studies of Alhouti et al. (2016) and Becker-Olsen et al. (2006), this research contributes important findings, complementing the literature regarding to the fast fashion market.

Ethicality was revealed to be a strong driver of CSR Authenticity. Singh et al. (2012) identify the benefit of the perceived ethicality, which translates into a positive evaluation of brand and product. Identifying perceived ethicality as a predictor of CSR Authenticity is extremely important to elaborate on the CSR strategies.

Beyond the CSR Authenticity, an attitude is made up of beliefs (cognitive), feelings (affective), and behavioral (conative) components, and knowing what consumers believe to be unethical (cognitive) is an advantage to the company (Shea, 2010). Understanding how perceived ethicality is important for the perception of CSR responsibility allows companies to align strategies with ethicality and apply it in the core of corporate decisions.

Our findings show that ethicality and CSR-fit are drivers of CSR Authenticity. However, if we analyze our hypothesis H2e, CSR Authenticity driving purchase intentions was not supported. Demonstrating similarity to Kuokkanen & Sun (2020) research, Ethicality and CSR-fit are desirable orientations in CSR programs, but do not have a significant impact on consumers. Besides the connection among authenticity and commercialization not being apparent (Holt, 2002), the skepticism within CSR programs is elevated and present among many consumers when CSR is perceived as inauthentic, especially in the case of a fast fashion company. It is important to elaborate a strategic CSR communication plan to minimize any misunderstanding. Companies have different levels of implementation and communication of CSR programs (Colucci et al., 2020), and a gap in communication can be solved by externalizing the intended social and environmental goals proposed in the company's CSR program.

Hypothesis H2c, CSR Authenticity impacting C. Engagement, was not supported by our results. As C. Engagement is translated into consumer advice for family and friends about the brand, it is closely related to the purchase intention. It is important to improve the marketing and communication of CSR characteristics on social media platforms, to dismiss the negative link between authenticity and C. engagement and Purchase intention. These results show that Authenticity is important to the CSR program, but it is not enough to translate into consumer attitude as purchase intention and consumer engagement.

Although CSR Authenticity does not show a direct impact on purchase intention, our results demonstrate an indirect effect through other variables, confirming our hypotheses H2a (social responsibility), H2b (general attitudes), and H2d (trust).

General Attitude, or corporate reputation, has particular importance to our research since the target company is a fast fashion enterprise, and as discussed above, fast fashion has a notably poor reputation regarding environmental and social issues. Our research brings good news to the market, demonstrating that CSR Authenticity affects the company's reputation. Our study adds knowledge to Kang & Hustvedt (2014) research on the influence of a company's social responsibility toward its general attitudes. The company's CSR strategic plan should focus on this connection in order to improve the consumer perception about the company's general attitudes. Kang & Hustvedt (2014) go further and identified a direct impact of general attitude on purchase intention.

Grohmann & Bodur (2015) identify variation in the consumers' perceptions of social responsibility among products' branding within the same company, even when the products compete in the same category. This demonstrates that brand social responsibility is different from company social responsibility, and that even a fast-fashion company can promote sustainable products or programs successfully.

Trust was the variable most affected by CSR Authenticity and emerges as a powerful driver of Purchase Intention, revealing great importance to the success of a CSR program. Our research is in accordance with many other investigations reported in the literature when finding trust to be an important predictor of a company's outcomes (e.g., Chuah et al., 2020; Kang & Hustvedt, 2014; Tian et al., 2011), and demonstrating the importance of the company to be reliable and promote sincere communication. In the same way that skepticism about companies is harmful, the outcomes of a CSR based on truth are real.

It is important to promote the brand's actions toward the environmental performance, the supply chain, and stakeholders through the CSR program, in order to increase consumer trust about the company's intentions. Studying trust in CSR programs, Kang & Hustvedt (2014) identified consumer's perceptions of the company's efforts to be transparent toward suppliers and stakeholders' conditions of labor, and social responsibility toward the local community as predictors of consumer's trust. This aligns with our research result, demonstrating authenticity as a predictor of trust. Thus, our findings on the role of trust in CSR programs add to the literature by presenting predictors of trust, and not only the outcome (Kang & Hustvedt, 2014).

Another important result of our study is the importance of social responsibility to the CSR program. Our findings demonstrate Authenticity as a predictor of social responsibility and consumer engagement and purchase intentions as outcomes. Social responsibility, as we expected, was found to

be relevant to the purchase intention and consumer engagement. For years companies have been utilizing social responsibility to create proximity between companies and consumers, or to restore a damaged reputation (as the case of Nike, which in the 1990s suffered boycotts after the media announced the poor working conditions in their supply chain). Today Nike funds projects to improve worker conditions (Zimmerli et al., 2007). Our results support previous research (e.g., Johnson & Chattaraman, 2019; Kang & Hustvedt, 2014; Porter & Mark R. Kramer, 2006) and highlight the importance of companies to invest in social responsibility.

By identifying Social Responsibility as a predictor of engagement, companies engaging in CSR create an important bond with their customers. Moreover, consumer engagement drives purchase intention. The interaction between management and consumers ensures the consumers' positive reaction and its great importance to CSR management (Kuokkanen & Sun, 2020).

Research involving consumer's perceptions and preferences on CSR clarify, and sometimes, surprise with the results, Kuokkanen & Sun (2020) found that philanthropy (one of the most traditional elements of CSR) influences unfavorably compared to the alternatives of social responsibility. Supporting the perception that it is not enough for the company to simply donate money to NGOs, but also actively participate in the local community or overseas communities affected by the company's activities.

In this study customer engagement emerges as a driver of purchase intention, confirming de Oliveira Santini et al. (2020) research, which identified purchase intention as a strong outcome of customer engagement, thus encouraging investment to create customer engagement associated with CSR programs. Social Responsibility impacts customer engagement and customer engagement impacts purchase intention. Companies invest in digital campaigns to create meaningful customer engagement (de Oliveira Santini et al., 2020). Chu et al. (2020) provides evidence of customer engagement through CSR programs presented on social media.

Also, Deng & Xu (2017) identified influences of CSR on customer intention for recommending and purchase. Besides highlighting the value of investing in Social Responsibility programs, our results support the investment in marketing campaigns to communicate the program, present the social and environmental impact results, and identify the consumers involved in the action, since the Social Signal is performed as a driver of purchase intention.

It is important to the consumers to send a message to society that they are consuming a green product, identifying themselves and signaling to the society how benevolent they are. This result is supported by Bennett & Chakravarti (2009) study, which associates signaling with CSR consumption.

Our results demonstrate the importance of the CSR program to be based on trust, and to be authentic, and not being merely a marketing strategy, a "greenwash", or even being accepted by society. The company must truly act ethically, starting from inside and going from internal stakeholders to external stakeholders and the community. We demonstrate that known elements can construct customer engagement and the company's desired outcome, such as purchase intention. CSR characteristics influence the consumer's choice and respond to demand for ethical business, and can create a competitive advantage for the business (Kuokkanen & Sun, 2020).

Our results are considerably important, as most of the hypotheses were supported, and a strategic framework of CSR was formed. Our results have support in previous literature and bring insights presenting important elements of CSR from a new perspective.

5.2. SOCIAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Beyond the theoretical considerations, this research brings social and practical implications to managers and companies, revealing that it is possible to combine corporate outcomes with social responsibility, creating the bridge between the company and the society through a strategic Corporate Social Responsibility program.

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the processes seeking sustainability. During the quarantine, consumers reflected about their fashion consumption, and paid more attention to the environmental issues and the impact of humans on nature. Furthermore, the economic impact brings movements to consume from local sources, and to help the most vulnerable and small local companies. The market is changing, big companies are under more pressure than ever to show their awareness about social problems, bringing emphasis to CSR programs.

To guarantee company competitiveness, it is important to show differentiation, but even more, to know how to implement and communicate companies' CSR programs successfully. Researchers have long alerted the business community about the importance of CSR programs as a key to differentiation and success in the market (e.g., Singh et al., 2012).

Kené Umeasiegbu, former Head of Environmental at Tesco (Richardson A., 2016), presented the strategies and difficulties to implement the CSR program at Tesco. Since Tesco does not produce the products sold in their stores, they were obliged to contact their suppliers and negotiate a more sustainable production chain, in line with the new standards established by the company having the goal of selling sustainable products. Tesco created a program to increase sustainability gradually, product by product. At the same time, the sustainable goals were presented to the consumers through the information in the product packaging.

Many studies demonstrate the necessity of companies to present the impact of the CSR program to clients in order to be perceived as authentic (e.g., Alhouti et al., 2016; Chuah et al., 2020). Mazutis & Slawinski (2015) studied the consumer perception of CSR authenticity and determined that consumers perceived companies as authentic when they found the union of two dimensions: distinctiveness (when the CSR is aligned with company mission, vision, and values) and social connectedness (when connected with the society). Our findings bring a similar perspective, identifying CSR-fit and ethicality as drivers of CSR Authenticity, and Authenticity as the principal driver of Trust, the most important driver of Purchase Intention followed by Social Responsibility. Creating a perspective of how important it is for the CSR program, the company is aligned with its mission and the social responsibility.

It is important for managers keep in mind that to implement a CSR program, the entire company needs to be aligned with the purpose – the change needs to start from inside the company and move outward from there. If the company wants to be perceived as ethical, it needs not only to invest in corporate communication, but also promote real corporate ethical behavior in all interactions with its customers (Singh et al., 2012).

Moreover, an important outcome of this research was to identify trust as a strong driver of purchase intention, reinforcing the importance of creating a serious CSR program. Otherwise, the company may suffer boycotts by promoting misleading benefits. As consumer engagement was identified as a driver of purchase intention, companies should improve their communication about their CSR programs' benefits in order to create and/or increase awareness among their clients (Sen et al., 2006). Through communication, companies can attract aware clients, presenting the benefits of the CSR programs, and promote purchase intention.

At the same time, the young generations are more interested in sustainability than are older consumers (Amed et al., 2018). Consumers have difficulty in perceiving their behavior in the garment market as unsustainable (Diddi et al., 2019), and/or have difficulty in changing to sustainable consumption because sustainable clothes are generally more expensive or even inaccessible. Moreover, many of them do not consider buying less to be an option (Diddi et al., 2019).

H&M's CSR program allows its consumers to change their wardrobe and be sustainable at the same time, since the customer is renting and thereby extending the lifetime of the clothing. The company also has the opportunity to present the world of sustainability to those clients who are not aware of the environmental issues, which is an effective strategy to create consumer involvement. Another important action to be adopted by managers to promote their CSR program is to share the results and impacts of the CSR programs in an accessible and tangible way (Alhouti et al., 2016).

6. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE WORK

This study has some limitations. First, the study was limited to countries where the target company (of this study) is present, excluding most parts of South America and other countries around the globe. Using a specific regional sample limits generalizability, and it would be interesting in future studies to apply the same framework to different regions and cultures in order to compare results.

Taking into consideration the product of the study and the actual norms and issues brought on by COVID-19, our results could be affected. Thus, future studies should evaluate the impact of COVID-19 on the clothes rental service. One of the biggest barriers to engaging the rental service until now has been the consumers' concern about hygiene, skin diseases, and cleanliness of the pre-worn clothes. However, new protocols of cleaning might positively affect the consumers' perception of the efficiency of cleaning services performed by clothing rental companies.

For future research it would be interesting to apply the variables in qualitative research, to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the drivers, since the CSR concept is wide and has many interpretations (J. S. Armstrong & Green, 2013). We identify a disconnect among CSR Authenticity, outcomes, purchase intention, and customer engagement. It would be interesting to explore in future research the combinations of CSR communication by the company's CSR program, with how it is communicated and how it is received by the consumer.

Utilizing this CSR framework to identify other consumers' outcomes, such as customer loyalty and perceived brand equity, would enrich the literature. Since trust and social responsibility were important elements, we suggest that further studies identify the weight of each social responsibility and the consumers' perceptions by trust.

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8. APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE

Construct	Items	Questions	Scale	Reference
CSR-Brand Fit To what extent do you agree with the statement below?	FIT1 FIT2 FIT3	The CSR behavior of H&M fits with its business The CSR behavior of H&M is relevant to its business The CSR behavior of H&M is appropriate for its brand image	(1) Strongly disagree to (9) Strongly agree	Ellen et al. (2006)
CSR Authenticity To what extent do you agree with the statement below?	CSRA1 CSRA2 CSRA3 CSRA4 CSRA5 CSRA6	H&M SCR action is genuine H&M action makes the company unique to me This CSR action is in accordance with H&M's value and beliefs H&M is standing up for what it believes in H&M is a socially responsible company H&M is concerned about improving the well-being of society	(1) Strongly disagree to (9) Strongly agree	Alhouti et al. (2016)
Trust To what extent do you agree with the statement below?	TT1 TT2 TT3 TT4 TT5	H&M does not pretend to be something it isn't H&M's CSR program claims are believable Over time, my experiences with H&M have led me to expect it to keep its promises, no more and no less H&M has a name you can trust H&M delivers what it promises	(1) Strongly disagree to (9) Strongly agree	Erdem & Swait (2004)
Purchase Intention To what extent do you agree with the statement below?	PI1 PI2 PI3	If I am planning to buy a service of this type, I will choose this service There is a great possibility that I will buy this service I am willing to pay a little more for this service	(1) Strongly disagree to (9) Strongly agree	Berens et al. (2005)
General Attitude Taking into account the fast fashion brand H&M, to what extent do you agree with the evaluation of the company below?	GENAT1 GENAT2 GENAT3	I think H&M is a very good brand I think H&M is a very useful brand My opinion of H&M is very favorable	(1) Strongly disagree to (9) Strongly agree	Sengupta & Johar (2002)

<p>Social Responsibility</p> <p>Taking into account the fast fashion brand H&M, to what extent do you agree with the evaluation of the company below?</p>	<p>SR1 SR2 SR3 SR4 SR5</p>	<p>H&M is committed to using a portion of its profits to help nonprofits H&M gives back to the communities in which it does business Local nonprofits benefit from H&M's contributions H&M integrates charitable contributions into its business activities H&M is interested in corporate giving</p>	<p>(1) Strongly disagree to (9) Strongly agree</p>	<p>Lichtenstein et al. (2004)</p>
<p>Perceived brand ethicality</p> <p>Taking into account the fast fashion brand H&M, to what extent do you agree with the evaluation of the company below?</p>	<p>ETH1 ETH2 ETH3 ETH4</p>	<p>I believe this company is ethical I believe this company brand is socially responsible I believe this company brand is socially conscious I believe this company brand is sustainable</p>	<p>(1) Strongly disagree to (9) Strongly agree</p>	<p>Grohmann & Bodur (2015)</p>
<p>Consumer engagement</p> <p>To what extent do you agree with the statements below?</p>	<p>CE1 CE2 CE3</p>	<p>I have been participating in the H&M's CSR activities I have been engaging in the H&M's CSR activities I have been interacting with H&M to support its CSR activities</p>	<p>(1) Strongly disagree to (9) Strongly agree</p>	<p>S. Kim (2019)</p>
<p>Social Signaling</p> <p>Thinking about your purchase and consumption behavior to what extent do you agree with the statement below?</p>	<p>SOS1 SOS2 SOS3 SOS4 SOS5</p>	<p>I purchase products from companies that are helpful to the global community I purchase products from companies that respect the environment I purchase from companies that have ethical practices toward their employees and environment. I buy products from companies that are well known for their socially responsible efforts I support causes that are socially responsible</p>	<p>(1) Strongly disagree to (9) Strongly agree</p>	<p>Johnson & Chattaraman (2019)</p>

