

The Benefits of Unrelated Brand Corporate Social Responsibility: An Abstract

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THE BENEFITS OF UNRELATED BRAND CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Abstract

This research analyzes how unrelated corporate social responsibility (CSR) actions influence brand symbolism. This research contributes to previous studies showing that CSR actions unrelated to the company's core business (i.e. with a community focus) have a greater appeal than actions with a focus on company's core competences (i.e. focus on the consumer). Results from four studies show that CSR actions unrelated to the company's core business, counterintuitively, increase brand symbolism, which, in turn, influences consumers' behavioral intentions. We propose that unrelated CSR actions can positively influence consumer perception of brand social responsibility and increase brand symbolism, generating positive behavioral outcomes. The findings have important implications for brands that wish to invest in corporate responsibility.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility; brand symbolism; brand social responsibility

Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been a growing strategic trend among companies (Corraliza and Berenguer, 2000), encompassing a wide range of actions such as philanthropy, cause marketing, minority support programs, socially responsible employment, and environmental sustainability (Ellen, Webb and Mohr, 2006; Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001). Companies are aware that engaging in corporate responsibility improves their brand awareness and performance, increasingly investing in socially responsible practices (Palma and Visser, 2012). For example, the largest Fortune 500 Companies invest more than \$ 15 billion a year in corporate responsibility programs (Financial Times, 2014). However, despite the growing investment in such strategies, relatively little is known about how consumers respond to corporate social responsibility activities (Romani, Grappi and Bagozzi, 2013).

For instance, after the Volkswagen scandal that affected more than 11 million cars worldwide and led to the resignation of its CEO, consumers started questioning whether socially responsible actions are authentic – i.e., companies are legitimately concerned with the causes they advocate – and whether these same actions are in the core of what companies provide to the market. Other companies became aware of the need for authenticity of corporate social responsibility initiatives (Harvard Business Review, 2015). Brand authenticity and the centrality of CSR actions (to a company's core activities) are the focus of our research.

Not every CSR action influences brand authenticity uniformly, however. Some actions might strengthen brand credibility, integrity, continuity, and symbolism (Morhart et al., 2015). We are especially interested in the effect that corporate social responsibility actions exercise over brand symbolism (i.e., a brand's potential to serve as a resource for identity

construction by providing self-referential cues representing values, roles, and relationships), which, in turn, is related to a consumer's emotional attachment to a brand (Morhart et al., 2015).

Similarly, not all CSR actions positively affect consumer behavior and brand performance. For example, prior research indicates that the impact of brand responsibility actions on consumer behavior may be negative (Grimmer and Bingham, 2013; Luchs et al. 2010), while a recent study (Chernev and Blair, 2015) shows that corporate social responsibility (CSR) unrelated to the company's core competencies can have a positive impact on perceived performance, depending on company motivation.

We unfold and expand on this last finding to show that CSR actions that are unrelated (vs related) to a company's core competence (e.g., helping the local community) increase perceived brand symbolism, which will, ultimately, influence behavioral intentions. Furthermore, we propose that this influence is explained by an increase in perceived brand social responsibility. We argue that unrelated CSR actions will present the company as more socially relevant and will increase consumers' perception of the brand social responsibility, increasing the perceived brand symbolism. In addition, we argue that brand symbolism is associated with positive behavioral outcomes, such as behavioral intentions towards the target brand. The following four studies bring evidence to support this argument. First, we show that unrelated CSR actions positively influence brand symbolism (Study 1). Second, we show that the influence of unrelated CSR actions on brand symbolism enhances consumers' behavioral intentions towards the brand (Study 2). Third, we bring evidence that brand social responsibility mediates the influence of CSR type and brand symbolism on consumers' behavioral intentions (Studies 3 and 4).

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Brand Symbolism

According to Vilanova (2009), corporate responsibility actions can be related to a company's corporate vision, including the development of corporate responsibility within the organization, governance, codes of ethics, values and reputation. It can also be related to the work environment, including labor practices and human rights issues; accountability, including corporate transparency, reporting and communication; market actions, including corporate responsibility practices directly related to the company's business activities, such as research and development, pricing, fair competition, marketing or responsible investment. For Villanova (2009), CSR actions can also be unrelated to the company's core business, when focused on community relations, including collaborations and partnerships with different stakeholders, corporate philanthropy and community action.

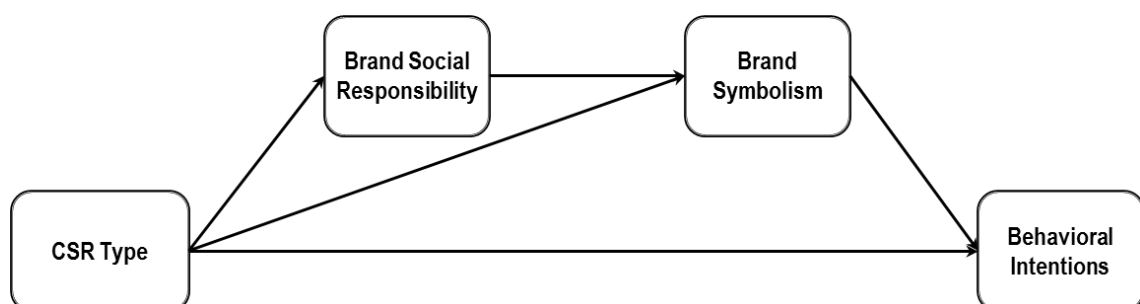
Although brand symbolism is gaining increasing interest in academic research and management practices, its literature is still scarce (Morhart et al., 2015, p.200). Brand symbolism is a fundamental concept of contemporary marketing, aiming to give brands a set of values that differentiate them from other companies (Beverland, 2005; Rose and Wood, 2005). According to Morhart et al. (2015), brand symbolism can be defined as the dimension of branding capturing meaning for consumers and carrying values shared with their target audience. This is critical because companies are increasingly using brand stories and associations as sources of value and legitimacy in the marketplace (Grayson and Martinec

2004; Peñaloza, 2000). It is important to note, however, that in the context of brands, the symbolism of corporate responsibility actions has not been addressed in depth.

Previous research has shown that corporate responsibility actions represent important information for consumers to evaluate a brand (Hoek, Rolling and Holdsworth, 2013). The results of previous studies suggest a positive relationship between sustainable practices and consumer attitudes, purchasing intentions and brand evaluations (Brown and Dacin, 1997; Ellen, Webb and Mohr 2006, Du, Bhattacharya and Sen, 2007). However, the impact of corporate responsibility on consumer decision-making is not fully understood (Thøgersen, Haugaard and Olesen, 2010). For instance, some research indicates that the impact of brand responsibility actions on consumer behavior may even be negative (Grimmer and Bingham, 2013). Therefore, there is still a need for an understanding of how consumers use a brand's corporate responsibility information for decision-making (Leire and Thidell, 2005).

According to Smith et al. (2010), corporate responsibility actions should provide a benefit to groups connected to the company, such as customers, employees, the environment and the community. A recent article analyzes the main characteristics of successful corporate responsibility activities: distinction and social connection (Mazutis and Slawinski, 2015). Distinction captures the extent to which corporate responsibility activities are aligned with their mission, vision and values (i.e., related to company's core competences). The social connection refers to the degree to which corporate responsibility efforts are incorporated into a larger social context (i.e., unrelated to company's core competences). Extending these results, this research bridges an existing theoretical gap by suggesting that CSR actions can influence how consumers perceive brand symbolism. We propose that corporate responsibility actions unrelated to the company's core business (e.g. linked to the community) will have a higher impact on brand symbolism than actions related to the company's core business (e.g. actions focused on consumers). We argue that unrelated CSR actions are more socially relevant (e.g. focus on community) and can increase consumers' perception of brand social responsibility, increasing brand symbolism. We propose that when companies invest in CSR unrelated to the company's core business, consumers perceive a higher level of brand social responsibility, having a positive impact on brand symbolism. We also suggest that brand symbolism is associated with positive behavioral outcomes, such as behavioral intentions towards the target brand. Therefore, we predict that brand social responsibility mediates the influence of CSR type on brand symbolism, which will, ultimately, influence behavioral intentions. Figure 1 presents our theoretical model to be tested in the following studies.

Figure 1. Model of CSR Type and Brand Symbolism



Overview of the Studies

This research comprises four studies. Studies 1 and 2 examined how CSR type (unrelated vs. related) influence brand symbolism. Study 1 tests the main effect of CSR Type (community vs consumer focus) on brand symbolism. Study 2 analyzes how CSR type and brand symbolism influences behavioral intentions of consumers of a new restaurant. Studies 3 and 4 evaluated the mediation process whereby corporate responsibility actions influence the brand symbolism, through consumer's perception of brand social responsibility. Study 3 examines the underlying process of brand social responsibility, using Forbes' Most Valuable Brands List (Forbes, 2016). Study 4 was conducted in a lab environment to provide further evidence to the underlying process of brand social responsibility and brand symbolism on behavioral intentions, using a new cookies brand.

Study 1: Main Effect of CSR Type on Brand Symbolism

Study 1 explored the relationship between CSR type and brand symbolism. Specifically, it tests the main effect of CSR type on brand symbolism. We propose that CSR actions that are unrelated (vs related) to a company's core competence is likely to have a positive impact on consumers' perceptions of brand symbolism. This argument is based on the notion that CSR actions unrelated to the company's core business (e.g., helping the local community) may not negatively influence perception of brand performance (Chernev and Blair, 2015; Luchs et al., 2010).

Design, participants, and procedure

Study 1 had a 2 (CSR type: unrelated, related) between subjects experimental design. One hundred eighty participants (57% male, $M_{age} = 35.0$, $SD = 11.8$) took part in the study and were randomly assigned for one of the two CSR conditions. Participants were recruited through the Amazon Mturk online platform; they completed the study online and were unaware of conditions, being told simply that they would complete an 8-minute survey about consumer behavior.

CSR Type: CSR type (unrelated vs. related) was randomly assigned between subjects using Smith et al. (2010) priming, in which a new restaurant brand called "Harrigans" engages in CSR actions that are either related to the company's core competencies (developing healthy menus for customers), or unrelated to core competencies (helping the local community). First, participants read a brief description of the new restaurant (Smith et al., 2010): "Imagine a fast-food restaurant called Harrigans that sells menu items for breakfast, lunch and dinner. It has 310,000 employees, and operates 10,500 restaurants in 53 countries". After that, participants read one of the two CSR descriptions, related to company's core business (e.g. "Based on its concern for its customers' health, Harrigans has embarked on an industry-leading strategy to promote healthy eating") or unrelated to the company's core business (e.g. "Based on its concern for the local community, Harrigans has

embarked on an industry leading strategy to work closely with local institutions to help promote the social integration of young offenders”).

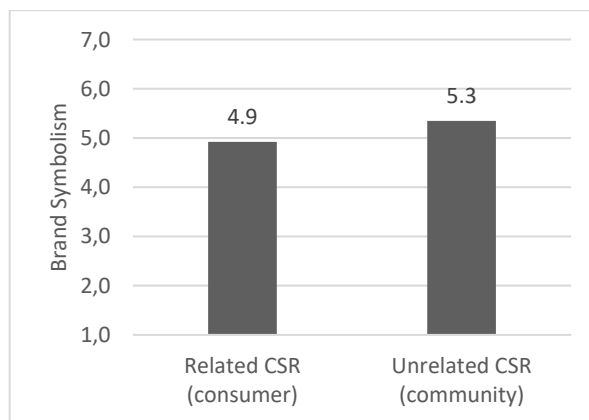
Manipulation checks indicated that CSR type priming worked correctly. We asked participants what was the focus of the company CSR: related (focus on consumers) vs. unrelated (focus on community). Thirteen participants failed this manipulation and were excluded from subsequent analyses. We have also checked the manipulation using Smith et al (2010) CSR type scale, with consumer focus (3 items, $\alpha = .900$) and community focus (3 items, $\alpha = .935$). As expected, participants perceived a higher consumer focus in CSR related condition ($F_{(1, 165)} = 4.44, p=0.05; M_{unrelated} = 5.7, M_{related} = 6.2$) and a higher community focus on CSR unrelated condition ($F_{(1, 165)} = 14.2, p=0.01; M_{unrelated} = 6.2, M_{related} = 5.3$).

Measures: Brand symbolism was measured using the 7-point scale from Morhart et al. (2015) ($\alpha = .924$, 4 items). Brand symbolism included the original 4-item scale: “Harrigans is a brand that adds meaning to people’s lives”, “Harrigans is a brand that reflects important values people care about”, “Harrigans is a brand that connects people with their real selves”, and “Harrigans is a brand that connects people with what is really important”. Brand credibility ($\alpha = .871$, 3 items, “This brand is credible/says the right things/ corresponds to the reality”) and advertising fluency (2 items, $\alpha = .821$, “This brand description is easy to understand/easy to handle”) were controlled for in all studies and did not influence the results. The order of all questions and scales were randomly counterbalanced in all studies and did not influence the results, thus will not be further discussed.

Results and Discussion

ANOVA results demonstrate that CSR actions unrelated to the company’s core business had a higher impact on brand symbolism than actions focusing on company’s core competencies ($F_{(1, 165)} = 3.85, p=0.05$). Contrasts indicate that unrelated CSR actions have a higher impact on brand symbolism than related CSR actions ($M_{unrelated} = 5.3, M_{related} = 4.9$). Figure 2 presents the effects of CSR type on brand symbolism.

Figure 2. The Effects of CSR Type on Brand Symbolism



Study 1 provides the first evidence that unrelated CSR have higher impact on brand symbolism than CSR related to the company’s core business. Study 1 also shows that the CSR

priming (Smith et al., 2010) worked correctly. The subsequent studies complement these findings by analyzing the role of CSR type on brand symbolism and on consumer behavioral intentions.

Study 2: Behavioral Outcomes of CSR Type and Brand Symbolism

Study 2 examines how CSR type and brand symbolism influence consumers' behavioral intentions, extending the findings of Study 1.

Design, participants, and procedure

Study 2 had a 2 (CSR type: unrelated, related) between subjects experimental design. One hundred twenty-two participants (53% male, $M_{age} = 34.7$, $SD = 9.99$) took part in the study and were randomly assigned for one of the two CSR conditions. Participants were recruited through the Amazon Mturk online platform to complete an 8-minute survey about consumer behavior.

CSR Type: CSR type was used in the same way as in Study 1. CSR type (unrelated vs. related) was randomly assigned between subjects using Smith et al. (2010) priming, in which a new restaurant brand engages in CSR actions that are either related or unrelated to the company's core competencies (see Study 1 for details). As in Study 1, manipulation checks indicate that CSR type priming worked correctly: CSR related - consumer focus (3 items, $\alpha = .931$) and CSR unrelated - community focus (3 items, $\alpha = .923$) (Smith et al., 2010). Participants perceived a higher consumer focus in CSR related condition ($F_{(1, 120)} = 7.58$, $p=0.01$; $M_{unrelated} = 5.2$, $M_{related} = 5.8$) and a higher community focus on CSR unrelated condition ($F_{(1, 120)} = 17.3$, $p=0.001$; $M_{unrelated} = 5.9$, $M_{related} = 5.1$).

Measures: Similar to Study 1, brand symbolism was measured using the 7-point scale from Morhart et al. (2015) ($\alpha = .909$, 4 items). After that, participants evaluated their behavioral intentions towards the brand (adapted from White et al., 2010 - $\alpha = .950$, 3 items): "I am likely to eat at Harrigans restaurant", "I am inclined to eat at Harrigans restaurant", and "I am willing to eat at Harrigans restaurant". Brand credibility ($\alpha = .903$, 3 items) and advertising fluency (2 items, $\alpha = .916$) were also controlled for in this study and did not influence the results.

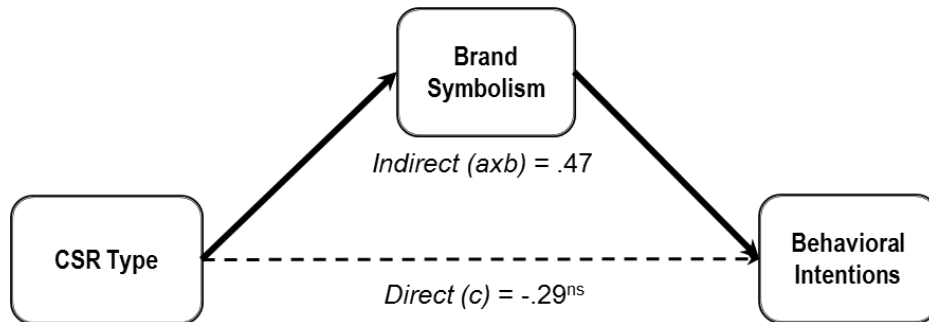
Results and Discussion

This section analyzes the how CSR type influences brand symbolism, impacting consumer behavioral intentions. The analyses use the bootstrap procedure suggested by Hayes (2013) and Zhao *et al.* (2010). All the analyses presented use the Hayes (2013) macro for SPSS® and 5,000 bootstrapped samples. In the bootstrapping procedure, the indirect effect (a x b) is significant when the confidence interval excludes zero (Zhao *et al.*, 2010).

A mediation model (Hayes, 2013; model 4) tested our hypothesis, using CSR type as the independent variable, brand symbolism as the mediator, and behavioral intentions as the dependent variable. Following the suggested procedure (Thompson and Malaviya, 2013),

CSR type was contrast coded in all bootstrap analysis: (1) unrelated CSR (-1) related CSR. Results support the indirect effect of CSR type (unrelated vs. related) on behavioral intentions through brand symbolism ($b = .47$; 95% CI = .09, .87). However, CSR type had no direct effect on behavioral intentions ($b = -.29$; 95% CI = -.64, .07).

Figure 2. The Effects of CSR Type on Brand Symbolism and Behavioral Intentions



The results in Study 2 provide further evidence that CSR actions unrelated to the company's core business have a higher impact on brand symbolism, and that brand symbolism is a driver for positive behavioral outcomes.

Study 3: Underlying Process of Brand Social Responsibility

Study 3 extends the results of the two previous studies (1 and 2) and reveals how CSR type influence brand symbolism through brand social responsibility. In this study, we further examine the effects of CSR type on brand symbolism, by exploring the underlying process under which the influence of CSR type occurs. We identify a mediation process that increases the role of unrelated CSR type on brand symbolism through consumers' perception of brand social responsibility. We propose that when companies invest in CSR unrelated to the company's core business, consumers perceive a higher level of brand social responsibility in their actions, having a positive impact on brand symbolism.

We test the effects of CSR type on brand symbolism using real brands as context. We have selected the top 10 brands in each category from Forbes World Most Valuable Brands (Forbes, 2016). By doing so, we attempt to enhance external validity of results, using real brands that are consolidated in the market.

Design, participants, and procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to evaluate 1 of the 10 Forbes' Most Valuable Brands in each category: Apple (technology), Nike (apparel), CocaCola (beverage), Toyota (automotive), Disney (entertainment), MCDonalds (food), GE (home appliances), AT&T (telecom), LVuitton (luxury), and Walmart (retail). Three-hundred and four participants recruited through the Amazon Mturk online platform took part in the study (53% male, $M_{age} = 34.7$, $SD = 9.99$) and received similar instructions than previous studies.

CSR Type: Study 3, we have measured the degree in which participants believed that the CSR focus was unrelated (focus on community) or related (focus on consumers) to the company's core business. We have used Smith et al (2010) scale for unrelated CSR Type (community-focused CSR, 3 items, $\alpha = .931$) and for related CSR (consumer-focused CSR, 3 items, $\alpha = .921$). We have used this procedure in Study 3 because we wanted to have consumers' opinions about brands that were already established in the market, increasing external validity of findings.

Measures: Similar to the previous studies, brand symbolism was measured using the 7-point scale from Morhart et al. (2015) ($\alpha = .917$, 4 items). Participants also evaluated brand social responsibility (Costa et al., 2016 - $\alpha = .935$, 3 items). The items evaluated by participants were "This brand is socially responsible," "This brand is congruent with my values," and "This brand has values close to me." Brand credibility ($\alpha = .895$, 3 items) was also controlled for in this study and did not influence the results. In addition, we have measured brand attitudes towards each brand, since consumers' might have some previous positive or negative attitudes towards a specific brand. The brand attitude items were measured in a differential semantic 7-point scale (Spears and Singh, 2004; 5 items, $\alpha = .979$): "appealing/unappealing", "good/bad", "pleasant/unpleasant", "favorable/unfavorable", and "likeable/unlikeable". However, consumers' previous brand attitudes did not influence the results.

Results and Discussion

This section analyzes the how CSR type influences brand symbolism, through brand social responsibility. A mediation model (Hayes, 2013; model 4) tested our hypothesis, using CSR type as the independent variable, brand social responsibility as the mediator, and brand symbolism as the dependent variable. Results support the indirect effect of CSR type on behavioral intentions through brand symbolism. For unrelated CSR focusing on community, the indirect effect of brand social responsibility was higher on brand symbolism ($b = .35$; 95% CI = .27, .43), when compared to core related CSR focusing on consumers ($b = .31$; 95% CI = .21, .41). However, the direct effect of CSR type on brand symbolism was higher for related CSR ($b = .33$; 95% CI = .23, .43) than unrelated CSR ($b = .25$; 95% CI = .16, .34).

Table 1. The Underlying Process of Brand Social Responsibility

CSR Type	Direct Effect (c) on Brand Symbolism	Indirect Effect (axb) of Brand Social Responsibility
Unrelated CSR (community)	.25 (.04) CI (95%) = .16, .34	.35 (.04) CI (95%) = .27, .43
Related CSR (consumer)	.33 (.05) CI (95%) = .23, .43	.31 (.05) CI (95%) = .21, .41

* Notes: Standard Error in parentheses. CI = confidence interval of 95%.

The results in Study 3 provide evidence that CSR actions unrelated to the company's core business have a higher impact on consumer perception of brand social responsibility, and that brand social responsibility has a positive impact on brand symbolism.

Study 4: Underlying Process and Behavioral Outcomes

Study 4 extends the previous studies by examining the role of brand social responsibility as the process underlying the influence of CSR type and brand symbolism on consumers' behavioral intentions. This study extends the previous studies in three ways. First, this study primes CSR type (unrelated vs. related) using two different ad versions of a new cookie brand. Participants were exposed to only one of the two ad options. Second, this study provides real evaluation of behavioral intentions of CSR type and brand symbolism, using a new brand of cookies as the context. Third, this study was conducted in a controlled lab environment at a major business school, using students as sample.

Design, participants, and procedure

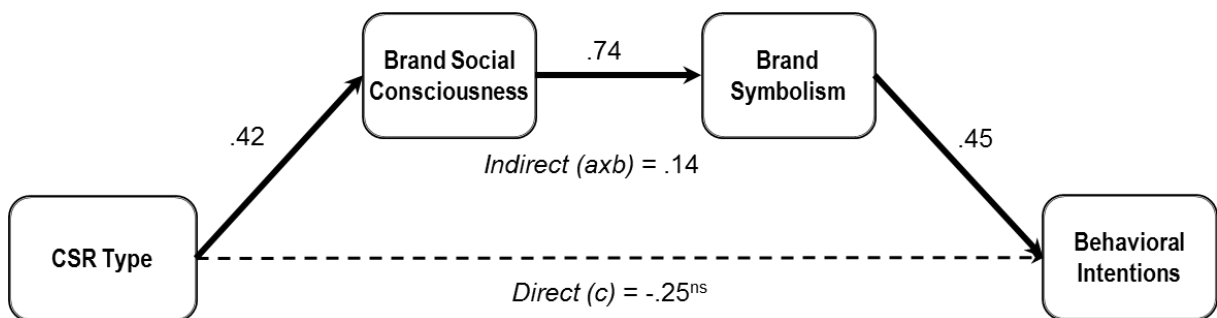
Study 4 had a 2 (CSR type: unrelated, related) between subjects experimental design. Eighty-nine students from a major business school took part in the study (60% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 21.3$, $SD = 5.4$) were randomly assigned for one of the two CSR conditions. Participants were invited to participate in a lab study to evaluate a "new cookie" brand (1 cookie per participant – 10g). Participants completed the study in the lab and were unaware of conditions, being told simply that they would complete unrelated tasks about consumer behavior in a session of 30 minutes for course credit. We checked whether participants could be aware the research objectives, but none of participants guessed. They were then debriefed and dismissed.

CSR Type: CSR type (unrelated vs. related) used a different procedure than previous studies. Before trying the product, participants were randomly assigned between subjects to read an ad of the new brand, including a brief description of the company's CSR type (either unrelated or related, adapted from Smith et al., 2010). Specifically, participants read that this new cookie brand engages in CSR actions that are either related to the company's core competencies (developing healthy cookies for customers) or unrelated to core competencies (helping the local producers) (see Appendix for details). Manipulation checks indicated that CSR type priming worked correctly. As expected, participants perceived a higher consumer focus in CSR related condition ($F_{(1, 83)} = 7.59$, $p=0.01$; $M_{\text{unrelated}} = 3.9$, $M_{\text{related}} = 4.4$) and a higher community focus on CSR unrelated condition ($F_{(1, 83)} = 12.1$, $p=0.001$; $M_{\text{unrelated}} = 3.9$, $M_{\text{related}} = 3.2$). After that, participants evaluated brand symbolism (Morhart et al., 2015 – $\alpha = .863$, 4 items), brand social responsibility (Costa et al., 2016 – $\alpha = .828$, 3 items), and stated their behavioral intentions towards the cookies ($\alpha = .885$, 3 items): "I would buy this cookie", "I like this cookie", "I find this cookie tasty". In this study, we have controlled for several items, and they did not influence the results: brand altruism (Chernev and Blair, 2015, $\alpha = .827$, 3 items), social goodwill (Chernev and Blair, 2015), previous brand knowledge ("I know this brand"), and recognition of brand CSR actions ("I know this brand CSR actions").

Results and Discussion

A sequential mediation model (Hayes, 2013; model 6) tested our hypothesis, using CSR type as the independent variable, brand social responsibility and brand symbolism as the mediators, and behavioral intentions as the dependent variable. Results support the indirect effect of CSR type (unrelated vs. related) on behavioral intentions through brand social responsibility and brand symbolism ($b = .14$; 95% CI = .05, .33). The causal chain indicates a positive relationship between unrelated CSR type and behavioral intentions, mediated by brand social responsibility and brand symbolism: CSR type ($b = .42$) \rightarrow brand social responsibility ($b = .74$) \rightarrow brand symbolism ($b = .45$) \rightarrow behavioral intentions. Similar to Study 2, CSR type had no direct effect on behavioral intentions ($b = .25$; 95% CI = -.12, .62). The results provide evidence for our proposed model of how unrelated CSR type influences brand social responsibility and brand symbolism (Figure 3).

Figure 3. The Underlying Process of Brand Social Responsibility



General Discussion

This research analyzed the role of corporate social responsibility actions on brand symbolism. Taken together, our findings provide evidence that CSR type (unrelated vs. related) can influence how consumers perceive brand symbolism, which, in turn, influences behavioral intentions. Through a series of four studies, we establish that, perhaps counterintuitively, CSR actions that are unrelated to the company's core business positively influence brand symbolism. Consequently, brands seeking to establish themselves as symbolic to their consumers would be better off investing in unrelated CSR actions. We also establish that this influence is substantively significant, by showing that brand symbolism affects behavioral intentions (e.g., likelihood of purchase). We build upon previous literature by showing that unrelated CSR actions indeed can have positive effects on consumer behavior. Furthermore, we explore the circumstances under which CSR influence brand symbolism, bridging two distinct streams of research, CSR initiatives and brand symbolism, traditionally separated in the literature (Mazutis and Slawinski, 2015).

This research contributes to previous studies (e.g. Luchs et al., 2010; Chernev and Blair, 2015), showing that CSR actions unrelated to the company's core business (i.e. with a community focus) have a greater appeal than actions with a focus on company's core competences (i.e. focus on the consumer). Luchs et al. (2010) has suggested that when CSR

focuses on company's products it may become a liability, especially when strength attributes are valued in the category. We demonstrate that unrelated CSR actions may increase brand strength and behavioral intentions, when brands focus on unrelated CSR actions (e.g. a cookies brand that helps local producers). We extend previous findings (Chernev and Blair, 2015) showing that the influence of CSR actions on brand symbolism depend on consumers' perception of brand social responsibility, independent of brand motivation (e.g. altruistic vs selfish motives). This can be explained because community-focused actions positively influence the perception of brand social responsibility, thereby increasing brand symbolism.

Beyond these theoretical contributions, our results have important implications for brands that wish to invest in corporate responsibility. Our findings may help companies on the understanding on how consumers respond to corporate social responsibility activities (Romani, Grappi and Bagozzi, 2013). We show a path to increase brand symbolism through corporate social responsibility actions unrelated to the company's core business. Furthermore, we show that brand symbolism has a positive effect on behavioral intentions. For companies interested in narrowing the gap between brand values and their consumers' values (i.e., increasing brand symbolism), our data suggest investments in CSR activities that stray from their core business.

Regarding limitations and future research, because this is an experimental approach, we were constrained by the realism, or lack thereof, of our manipulations. Our first two studies employed fictitious brands to manipulate related and unrelated CSR actions and to gauge its influence on brand symbolism. To have real brands as targets in our first two studies would have brought a myriad of confounds to our findings but would enrich our conclusions. We attempted to correct for this limitation in our following studies by bringing real brands to our designs, trading-off some of our experimental control. Regardless, we see future studies striking a balance between the realism of actual brands and the control of laboratory contexts.

This set of studies is limited to the effects of CSR actions centrality on brand symbolism. However, we purposely left other dimensions of brand authenticity (e.g., credibility, continuity and integrity) out of our scope. Future studies could offer a more integrative view of the brand authenticity phenomenon by considering other dimensions of brand authenticity and, more importantly, possible trade-offs between them. For example, will brand symbolism increase to the detriment of integrity? Similarly, we looked at related and unrelated CSR actions, but we acknowledge that there are nuances between these two dichotomous categories. Maybe the effect of centrality (i.e., being related or unrelated) on brand authenticity is granular, where the farther we move from the company's core business, the greater the brand symbolism.

Finally, we treated brand symbolism as something desirable, a dimension of brand authenticity that every company should pursue. Future studies could investigate the dynamic between brand symbolism and marketing metrics. We have shown, for example, that unrelated CSR actions will increase brand symbolism, but what are their impact on sales and overall brand equity?

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APPENDIX
CSR Type Ads in Study 4

<p align="center">CSR Unrelated to Core Business (community focus)</p>	<p align="center">CSR Related to Core Business (consumer focus)</p>
 <p align="center">HELPS THE FAMILIES OF LOCAL PRODUCERS MAKES FAIR TRADE A DELIGHT</p> <p align="center">Quality of life for you and for the local community, the practical option that completes your routine!</p> <p align="center">FAIR TRADE HARRIGANS BAKERY</p> 	 <p align="center">HELPS MAINTAINING A HEALTHY DIET MAKES YOUR DIET A DELIGHT</p> <p align="center">Quality of life for you, with low calorie, the healthy option that completes your routine!</p> <p align="center">HEALTHY HARRIGANS BAKERY</p> 