The Risk of Greenwashing in Corporate Social Responsibility Communications

Alexandra Cotrufo, Bachelor of Arts (Honours)

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Faculty of Social Sciences, Brock University
St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada

Abstract

There is a growing expectation from consumers that companies recognize the environmental impact of their businesses and engage in corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. While the demand for CSR has increased, so has the prevalence of greenwashing, which has caused consumers to be more skeptical about a company's motives when CSR is promoted. Marketing practitioners are faced with the challenge of balancing the demand for corporate responsibility with the skepticism of greenwashing. This study consists of a survey of 22 marketing practitioners in Canada to explore their experiences when developing CSR-related communications and how they establish trust with audiences to reduce the perception of greenwashing. The results illustrate that practitioners manage the risk of greenwashing by developing messages that do not self-promote, showcasing concrete action and evidence to support claims, relying on positive marketing appeals such as pride and compassion, and tailoring messages based on the audience and industry a company belongs to.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility, CSR, sustainability, greenwashing, marketing communications

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Diminishing natural resources, global warming, wildlife extinction, and inequality are some of the social and environmental issues we are faced with today, caused by an increasing population, the exploitation of ecosystems and resources, technological changes, and more. Now more than ever, these global challenges must be addressed, and sustainable development is needed to overcome them and create a healthy planet and thriving economy to benefit as many people as possible.

In recent years, due to these increasing concerns, citizens have become more aware of how their actions affect the health of our environment, and they are expecting that the companies they support take the precautions needed to protect ecosystems and consider the potential social, economic, and environmental impacts of their businesses (Ye et al., 2020). One of the ways that companies have responded to this expectation is through investments in corporate social responsibility (CSR), which includes initiatives such as developing more sustainable and ethical products, considering the environment in procurement practices, improving employee welfare, and supporting charitable organizations. CSR involves advancing social good beyond what is required by the law (Kang et al., 2016) and taking initiative to give back to society and the environment. CSR plays an important role in the global corporate agenda and its aim to advance into a more socially conscious environment (Du et al., 2010), as it holds companies accountable for their business processes and how they may negatively impact the environment and society. There has been a growing demand from consumers and other interested parties for companies to display efforts of CSR, and profit and customer loyalty can be put in jeopardy depending on whether or not a company chooses to respond to this demand. In 2011, only 20% of the Standard and Poor's 500 companies published CSR reports, in comparison to 92% in 2020 (Governance & Accountability Institute, 2021). This is an increase of 72% in just under 10 years, which showcases how quickly the interests of consumers can change a market.

A growing demand in the last decade for increased CSR and sustainability efforts has resulted in firms spending large amounts of money on environmental advertising and CSR initiatives (Nyilasy et al., 2014) to appease to the public and showcase that they are contributing to causes most important to society. Patagonia is a great example of a company that communicates about its environmental initiatives in many of their advertisement campaigns. This clothing company focuses its entire brand on transforming their business practices to reduce their environmental impact and on supporting causes that help fight against climate change. Upon visiting their website, it is immediately evident through its news stories on various environmental topics—such as forest conservation—and its partnerships with global activists that they care about the impact of their business and they want consumers to know the steps they are taking to give back to the planet and protect it from future harm. The company even has a separate website for their environmental campaigns, which connect people all over the world with climate initiatives they can get involved in. Furthermore, the company's founder Yvonne Chouinard recently transferred his entire ownership of the company, valued at around $3 billion (Gelles, 2022), to the Patagonia Purpose Trust and the Holdfast Collective, which is "a nonprofit dedicated to fighting the environmental crisis and defending nature" (Chouinard, n.d.). This is one example of a company who has listened to the demands of its consumers and taken the transformational steps needed to address the climate crisis. Consumer demand can further be

seen in media coverage of CSR and other environmental-related topics. This coverage has been steady in the past five years, and Google trends for topics such as climate change, sustainability, and greenwashing indicate a rise in global web searches over the last two years. For example, Google web searches worldwide of the term sustainability were given a value of 52 in February 2021 and a value of 88 in February 2023, indicating an increased interest (Google Trends, n.d.). Similarly, Google web searches worldwide of the term greenwashing were given a value of 26 in February 2021 and a value of 75 in February 2023 (Google Trends, n.d.).

Furthermore, a report on global corporate CSR spending found that Global Fortune 500 firms spend an average of $20 million a year on CSR activities—with 62% coming in-kind donations, 28% coming from cash contributions, and volunteering and philanthropy activities making up the final 10% (Dattani et al., 2015)—and the growth of global environmental, social, and governance investing has now reached the trillions of dollars (Bernardino, 2021). In a 2018 Cone Communications study on climate change, it was found that 62% of participants believe climate change is an issue and 58% feel companies should take the lead in addressing climate change, find solutions to environmental issues, and make commitments (Cone, 2018). The call for greater accountability and responsibility on behalf of companies is a positive step in the right direction towards greater sustainable development and social welfare.

When implemented properly, CSR has immense potential to create progress toward climate action, employee welfare, strengthened communities, and more. Not only is CSR a powerful force that can create positive global change, but it also provides opportunities that can increase multi-faceted business returns for companies (Du et al., 2010), such as increased purchase intentions, positive word-of-mouth, attracting more investors and potential employees, and recognition for environmental efforts. For example, Accenture made the 2021 list of Canada's Greenest Employers by integrating production goals such as reducing their carbon output by 11% by 2025, along with Printing House LTD., who made a commitment to plant a tree for every new account opened with them (Meehan, 2021). However, the method and degree to which CSR is communicated greatly affects its ability to be positively perceived by the public (Viererbl & Koch, 2022), and a major challenge in CSR communications is balancing the public demand for good corporate citizenship with skepticism of a company's motives when efforts are promoted (Du et al., 2010). According to Connors et al. (2017), with instances of corporate hypocrisy becoming more common and public, "consumers have developed an inherent general skepticism towards firms' corporate social responsibility claims" (p. 599). Their study on mitigating the negative effects of skepticism towards CSR argues that a growing number of consumers are starting to consider acts of CSR as "window-dressing", which is when companies employ self-serving practices to distract from the truth about the situation or their harmful actions (2017, p. 599). Similarly, Xu and Kochigina (2021) argue that despite a large portion of consumers expecting that companies take action against social and environmental issues, they remain skeptical of motives and actual impacts when CSR efforts are communicated, something they refer to as the "Catch-22 challenge", where consumers expect efforts to be made but are also critical of those efforts when they are shown (p. 1). Connors et al. (2017) believe that due to the increase in skepticism towards CSR initiatives, firms must find ways to deliver information about efforts in credible ways to avoid negative reception. The current study builds on this previous literature by directly surveying marketing professionals who have experience developing CSR-related campaigns.

While the increasing demand for CSR is pushing more companies to engage in sustainable business practices and make a greater effort to reduce their negative environmental impacts and increase their social contributions, some companies are employing greenwashing tactics in their communications—which is the act of "intentionally misleading or deceiving consumers with false claims about a firm's environmental practices and impact" (Nyilasy et al., 2014, p. 693)—to make it appear as though they are making sustainable and social progress, solely to reap the benefits of the increased consumer loyalty and revenue that may come along with CSR efforts.

There has been a drastic increase in concern over greenwashing over the last two decades, and consumers and other interested parties have become skeptical of CSR's motives because of it (Gatti et al., 2019). Growing skepticism of greenwashing has caused consumers to question the sincerity of companies when they display efforts of corporate responsibility, as they may appear to be more self-congratulatory than impactful. If CSR is not presented transparently or if it is being communicated too often with little action being done, consumers may accuse companies of engaging in greenwashing. Companies who apply greenwashing tactics to their CSR communications do so to "deflect attention from their unethical conduct to attract eco-conscious consumers, prevent protest and appear to be in line with government regulations" (Vollero et al., 2016, p. 122). According to a 2007 study by TerraChoice, there are seven "Sins of Greenwashing", which include hidden trade-offs, false labels, and vagueness among others (UL, n.d.). If a product is perceived to include one or more of these greenwashing traits, CSR may have an adverse effect on the reputation of a company and its established trustworthiness.

An increasing number of organizations have been accused of making CSR claims on environmental issues, but not following up with any concrete and measurable action (Gatti et al., 2019). For example, fast fashion companies such as H&M and Zara have implemented CSR programs and "eco" clothing lines that aim to improve their brand image and showcase that they are increasing their environmental sustainability (Wei & Jung, 2022). However, even though many fast fashion brands claim they are making efforts to become more sustainable through "environmentally friendly" collections and other sustainability initiatives, most of their products are still manufactured based on the fast fashion model, which is detrimental to the environment (Wei & Jung, 2022). Consumers base their purchasing decisions largely on a company's advertising and messaging, and greenwashing threatens one's confidence in the marketing of products because it has become difficult to know what information is truly trustworthy (Chen & Chang, 2013). Another example of greenwashing is that of the infamous Beyond Petroleum (BP) oil disaster that took place in 2010. The BP oil spill, which took the lives of 10 workers and resulted in devastating environmental impacts, represents a failure of CSR and implicates questions about how corporations present themselves to the public (Cherry & Sneirson, 2011). Prior to the explosion and oil spill, BP had a highly successful advertising campaign to "Go Green", which portrayed themselves as environmentally conscious and as an advocate for CSR (Cherry & Sneirson, 2011). This was a unique marketing move at the time and a major event for the energy industry (Vries et al., 2015). However, their lack of disaster preparation and their efforts to shift blame away from themselves in response to the spill created a disconnect between what they were telling the public and what they were doing behind the scenes, breaking the trust they built with the public through their CSR marketing efforts (Cherry & Sneirson, 2011). In the

case of BP, the company used CSR as a marketing scheme to gain the loyalty and buy-in from interested parties and investors, rather than to create positive environmental action (Cherry & Sneirson, 2011). These incidents are examples of how greenwashing within CSR communications can negatively impact an organization's reputation and the perception of the public.

This paper explores the implications that arise when greenwashing tactics are used by companies, and how these implications affect the positive impact and potential value of CSR. It further investigates the experience of marketing practitioners when developing CSR-related communications and responding to consumer perception. The following sections will include the research questions that guided the creation of this paper, a literature review of CSR communications with a specific focus on greenwashing, the methodology for the study, findings, discussion, practical implications, research limitations and future opportunities, and a conclusion.

Chapter 2: Research Questions

The purpose of this paper is to explore how marketing practitioners communicate about CSR initiatives amidst growing concerns of greenwashing. It further explores whether marketers experience hesitation when communicating about CSR due to the fear of being seen as insincere and potentially tarnishing the reputation of the companies and non-profit organizations they work with and reducing employee morale. The study identifies best practices for marketers to adopt when communicating about CSR, which can lead to positive reception and change in consumer behaviour. The following research questions guided the study:

1) What factors contribute to both positive and negative consumer responses to CSR communication?
2) How do marketing practitioners communicate about CSR to avoid the perception of greenwashing?
3) How can organizations increase trust and be transparent with the public about their motivations behind CSR communication?

Although the impact of greenwashing on CSR communications has been explored in the literature (Viererbl & Koch 2022, Bernardino 2021, and Vollero et al. 2016), much of this research has focused on how greenwashing prevents consumers from showcasing loyalty to a brand and tarnishes the reputation of companies. Less attention has been given to how marketers are impacted by the increasing levels skepticism and how this skepticism guides the decisions they make when developing CSR campaigns. As marketers are tasked with making the important decision of how best to communicate about CSR efforts, the current research explores how practitioners aim to establish trust with consumers and avoid falling into the trap of greenwashing. Since marketing agencies are primarily responsible for the advertisement and communication of CSR initiatives, it is important to address this research gap and explore the extent to which greenwashing skepticism plays a role in the development of CSR communications, as these findings can help build more responsible marketing practices that showcase transparency and accountability on the behalf of companies.

This research paper addresses this gap in the literature by offering practical contributions for marketing practitioners seeking to communicate their CSR efforts more effectively, as well as for management and decision-makers in companies aiming to implement sustainable business practices. In the following sections, the researcher provides an overview of the current literature on CSR communications and greenwashing.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

3.1 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

While matters concerning the environment, economy, and society were previously the responsibility solely of governments, the traditional roles of companies have evolved over time to share these responsibilities (Schmeltz, 2012) and hold themselves accountable for their contributions to global issues, such as climate change. Companies now showcase this responsibility through communicating about their corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts in areas of philanthropy, climate action, social advocacy, and more. This can be showcased through actions such as ensuring products are sustainably and ethically produced, considering the environment in procurement practices, improving employee welfare through providing educational growth opportunities, and supporting charitable organizations through monetary or in-kind donations. CSR is an evolving and multi-faceted term which, according to Peloza & Shang's (2011) study on CSR and value for stakeholders, primarily focuses on three broad areas of philanthropy, business practices, and product-related. The authors conducted a systematic literature review on 163 articles relating to how CSR activities can impact the behaviours of consumers and other interested parties. They found that philanthropy was the primary category of all CSR activities present, representing 65% of the activities found in their review. This was followed by business practices and product-related features. They argue that focusing on "CSR activities as a source of self-oriented value for consumers provides an opportunity for marketers to create differentiation and augment what is a dominant emphasis on other-oriented value" (Peloza & Shange, 2011, p. 130). However, a company's understanding of CSR is largely dependent on the aspects they choose to focus their efforts on, therefore, it is a complex concept which is difficult to define. One of the earliest definitions of CSR comes from the founder of the term, Howard Bowen, who described it as the responsibility of companies to pursue actions and integrate policies that are beneficial for society (Wu et al., 2020). Other scholars define CSR as "integrating sustainable development principles within business strategies and operations" (Thompson, 2019, p. 498), and others as a response to demands from external stakeholders (Karwowski & Raulinajtys-Grzybek, 2021). For the purposes of this paper, Thompson's (2019) definition is adopted due to the researcher's particular interest in exploring the risk of greenwashing in CSR communications regarding environmental welfare.

Regardless of how individual companies choose to define their socially and environmentally responsible behaviours, one thing is clear: there has been a growing demand from consumers and other interested parties for companies to display efforts of CSR. Companies can no longer just be concerned with the success of their businesses and how much profit they make every year. As stated by Bernardino (2021), "To survive and remain sustainable, corporations need to revise their mode of operations and reflect on how they can and should create a positive impact for society and the environment" (p. 103). There are incentives for firms

who choose to respond to these increasing demands for greater environmental responsibility. Firms who communicate about their environmental efforts can experience positive effects including enhancing their reputation (Viererbl & Koch, 2022), greater consumer loyalty, an increase in brand champions and ambassadors, business investments, interest from potential talent in working for them, and greater profit (Du et al., 2010). Some studies have also found that CSR not only provides business return benefits for firms, but also for consumers who engage with environmentally and socially responsible companies. According to Alhouti & D'Souza's (2018) study on the benefits of CSR for consumers, they found that consumers can benefit from engaging in CSR through their purchasing decisions in ways of spirituality, efficiency, aesthetics, and status. Furthermore, Green and Peloza's (2011) study found that consumers experience the value of CSR in the following ways: emotional, social, and functional. Emotional value occurs when consumers feel positively about their decision to support CSR, such as by purchasing a sustainable product. Social value occurs when people who engage with companies that promote CSR are regarded highly by others. Lastly, functional value occurs when a consumer benefits from the actual product or service they receive from the company, which also benefits the environment in some way (Green & Peloza, 2011). In addition to these CSR values, it has been noted that there is a growing desire for consumers to showcase dedication to sustainability and environmental welfare through their own purchasing decisions so they can be viewed as more conscious shoppers (Parguel et al., 2015). To address the growing consumer demand for CSR action, marketing practitioners are being relied on to communicate the environmental efforts of companies. One purpose of this study is to explore the communication methods marketing practitioners adopt to gain positive reception from interested parties and leverage value for consumers when they engage with CSR initiatives.

3.2 CSR Communications

Consumers recognize that, although companies play a large role in advancing global sustainability through their business decisions, they too have the power to make an impact based on the products they purchase and the companies they support (Golob et al., 2019). Whether or not CSR efforts will be accepted and viewed positively by consumers and other interested parties is largely dependent on how marketers communicate about a company's environmental initiatives. According to Van de Ven's (2008) ethical framework for marketing CSR, they identified three approaches to how companies can disseminate information to their consumers and other interested parties about their efforts. The Appendices showcases a table outlining these approaches, as adapted by Parguel et al. (2011) (Table 1). Van de Ven (2008) recommends that companies adopt a strategic approach to CSR communications, which integrates the marketing and business goals of a firm as well as its core values.

Some scholars have argued that since CSR covers a broad spectrum of activities, and not every consumer or stakeholder views all CSR actions as positive, we must take careful consideration when communicating about corporate responsibility, so as to be clear about the intentions of the company engaging in it (Peloza & Shang, 2011). Companies have tried to enhance and showcase their commitment to CSR through their corporate marketing materials (Vollero et al., 2016) as a way to let audiences know they are taking action and addressing the health of the environment in their business decisions. Communication is critical for ensuring that consumers understand the positive benefits that can come from supporting a company that

showcases CSR efforts, for holding companies accountable for their actions and for how they aim to use their power to benefit the environment, and for enabling consumers and other interested parties to "make sense of the world" (Crane & Glozer, 2016, p. 1224). It has been found that since CSR—while very much so encouraged by the public—is completely voluntary, there are few guidelines surrounding how a company should communicate about their environmental efforts to the public, which often results in the creation of grey zones that can result in misleading communications (Gatti et al., 2019). This can make it difficult for marketing practitioners to navigate CSR communication and determine the best way to share messages about a company's efforts with the public. This study builds off these findings in the literature, which showcase the importance of good CSR communication, to determine how marketing practitioners navigate grey zones (Gatti et al., 2019) and build trust with their audiences.

While CSR communication has the potential to generate positive benefits for a company, it simultaneously has the potential to tarnish the reputation of a company depending on how these CSR efforts are relayed to audiences (Viererbl & Koch, 2022), as a number of factors could result in people not trusting communications and perceiving them as being misleading. Therefore, implementing effective communication strategies is critical for marketers to consider for the success and acceptance of CSR efforts, and not communicating effectively about CSR can potentially harm the reputation of a company if they are accused of engaging in greenwashing. There are many recent examples of companies who have engaged in some form of greenwashing and who have been held publicly accountable for their harmful actions. One such example is when popular coffee brewing system manufacturer, Keurig, informed their Canadian market that their single-use coffee capsules could be emptied, rinsed, and recycled in the Blue Bin stream across the country. This information was incorrect, as the capsules could only be recycled in Quebec and British Columbia, but could not be accepted by recycling systems in all other Canadian provinces. This generalized and misleading information caused some cities, such as Toronto, to revert nearly 100 tonnes of capsules from recycling bins and resulted in a fine of $3 million for Keurig (Akepa, 2021). Another greenwashing example is when multinational oil and gas company, Shell, attempted to leverage social media as a way to place the responsibility of climate action away from themselves and onto consumers. They did this by posting a poll to Twitter in 2020, posing the question "What are you willing to change to help reduce emissions? #EnergyDebate" (Akepa, 2021). While the poll had nearly 200 responses, Shell received backlash from Twitter users and the public because the company is responsible for around one to two percent of global emissions, and they continue to invest billions of dollars in the oil and gas industry (Akepa, 2021). Therefore, their tweet came across as insincere and was viewed as a form of greenwashing by many politicians, environmentalists, and other Twitter users. Following this incident, a European court ordered Shell to reduce their emissions by 45% below 2019 levels by 2030 (Akepa, 2021), an important action that can help keep companies accountable for their harmful environmental decisions.

3.3 Greenwashing

Although few would deny the positive ways in which companies who engage in CSR have contributed to the environment and social good, it is not uncommon to hear about concerns of greenwashing when CSR efforts are communicated (Wu et al., 2020). In order to keep up with growing demands for greater corporate responsibility and environmental accountability, many

companies have tried to enhance communications regarding their commitment to sustainability in their marketing materials (Vollero et al., 2016). Although there are countless benefits to engaging in CSR, some companies only focus on the potential benefit of increased profit, and therefore manipulate their marketing communications to "deflect attention from their unethical conduct to attract eco conscious consumers, prevent protest and appear to be in line with government regulations" (Vollero et al., 2016). This is referred to in the scholarly literature as greenwashing.

According to Torelli et al. (2019), there are four main levels of greenwashing that can be distinguished based on specific goals and communication methods. These levels include the corporate level: misleading environmental communication about data and aspects related to a company's image and reputation, the strategic-level: misleading environmental communication related to the future strategies of a company, the dark-level: misleading environmental communication intended to disguise illegal activities, and the product-level: misleading environmental communication regarding specific features of a product or a family of products (Torelli et al., 2019). Their study uses legitimacy and signaling theory to assess the influences that these four levels of greenwashing have on peoples' perception of environmental CSR communications, and they found that these various levels do indeed have a significant effect on the public perception of CSR (Torelli et al., 2019). Previous literature suggests that there are three categories of greenwashing: making false claims about the sustainability of a product and/or it's positive environmental impact, omitting important information about a product or service to disguise a negative environmental impact, and the most severe of the categories; lying about a product or service (Kangun et al., 1991). Regardless of how greenwashing is defined and understood, the main factor in determining if a company is engaging in it is whether or not they are obscuring information or lying about their environmental actions through communications. Further, greenwashing can be understood as a gap between rhetoric and reality in which the truth about a CSR initiative is misrepresented to a degree in communications (Vries et al., 2015).

It is important to note that a company can have a negative environmental record and not be accused of greenwashing, so long as they are not making false claims about their positive actions or promoting CSR efforts in any way (Gatti et al., 2019). For example, it is well-known that most fast fashion companies do not benefit the environment, and instead harm the environment due to their unsustainable production methods. However, if a fast fashion company is not making false or skewed claims about the sustainability of their products, they cannot be considered as engaging in greenwashing simply because their business is harmful to the environment. However, "the likelihood that engaging in CSR activities creates a favorable company image reduces when companies with bad reputations (e.g., companies in the tobacco and energy industries) engage in activities in the domain of the company's core business" (Vries et al., 2015). Therefore, it is likely that companies with bad environmental reputations will be perceived more negatively when communicating about CSR efforts than those who have already proven consideration to sustainability through their business practices. With this in mind, the important relationship between greenwashing and CSR communications can be understood, as the way in which a company communicates about their environmental efforts greatly influences the level of greenwashing skepticism a consumer may have. It is beneficial for marketers to consider the various levels of greenwashing when crafting CSR communications, as having a well-rounded understanding of this harmful marketing practice can help prevent integrating

greenwashing principles into communications, and therefore reduce the chances of a CSR campaign being perceived negatively.

Greenwashing is harmful because it prevents consumers and other interested parties from making informed decisions about the companies they want to support, due to the fear that the company may not be sincere about their CSR claims and may be engaging in misleading communications. When some companies choose to apply greenwashing practices to their marketing, they are also endangering the entire industry of businesses engaging in CSR and sustainable practices, since consumers do not know who and who not to trust (Chen & Change, 2013). Whether or not claims of environmental benefit are sincere, the fear of greenwashing "creates difficulties for consumers who attempt to distinguish between truly virtuous firms and firms taking opportunistic advantage of sustainable development trends" (Parguel et al., 2011, p. 15). In their study on the effects of green advertising and corporate environmental performance on consumer reactions, Nyilasy et al. (2014) found that negative consumer attitudes towards a brand were stronger when their marketing materials communicated about environmental initiatives rather than general corporate advertising. Due to the increasing amount of greenwashing tactics being used in marketing materials, it is understandable why consumers are more skeptical when environmental claims are made. When consumers are faced with CSR advertising, they "may start to form negative attributions about the motives of the company, attributing them to ulterior motives" and labelling them as greenwashing (Nyilasy et al., 2014, p. 701). The perception of greenwashing can be caused due to a number of reasons. Primarily, companies may be accused of greenwashing if they engage in a high level of CSR activities but do not showcase actual positive benefits in their actions (Viererbl & Koch, 2022).

Perhaps surprising, some of the literature on greenwashing argues that although greenwashing is negative, it also has the ability to produce a positive element. While greenwashing usually involves incomplete or inaccurate information about a company's products, services, and business processes for the purpose of deceiving consumers, this can also act as a motivator for other firms to stay clear of any greenwashing attempts (Wu et al., 2020). By understanding that incomplete and inaccurate information may result in a tarnished reputation, companies can be motivated to perform better than those who engage in greenwashing by providing accurate and fulsome details about their CSR efforts (Wu et al., 2020). If greenwashing did not pose a risk to companies, they would not feel motivated to go above and beyond to instill trust in their consumers and provide them with sufficient data to make informed purchasing decisions. Therefore, while engaging in the act of greenwashing is negative and increases the chances of a company receiving backlash regarding CSR efforts, the fear of being accused of greenwashing can motivate companies to increase transparency so they can be differentiated from firms who are solely concerned with increasing profit. However, greenwashing mostly has negative effects on consumer trust of CSR and environmental claims, and prevents people from purchasing products or supporting companies who are truly making strides towards greater sustainable development (Chen & Chang, 2013). This study builds off these findings by exploring the degree to which marketing practitioners hesitate to communicate about CSR efforts to avoid the risk of being perceived as greenwashing, and if this potential risk motivates them to showcase greater transparency in their communications.

3.4 The Risk of Greenwashing in CSR Communications

A growing concern for consumers and interested parties is that many companies who promote CSR as part of their business models may not be translating their promises into measurable outcomes which have positive impacts on the environment and society. This can be considered as an outside-in approach which is reactive, addresses business risks and opportunities in a limited and narrow manner, and does not align with ecosystem values (Weber & Saunders-Hogberg, 2018). This negative approach focuses more on the risk and opportunities of a company, rather than the risk a company causes to the environment and the opportunity CSR can provide to counteract some of those risks (Weber & Saunders-Hogberg, 2018). An outside-in approach can lead to negative perception from consumers and interested parties because it can be viewed as greenwashing. To prevent CSR communications from appearing to only benefit a company's reputation and revenue, companies usually adopt a two-way communication strategy to increase transparency (Vollero et al., 2016). However, skepticism remains prominent as one out of three consumers surveyed in a U.S. study do not trust companies who make environmental claims about their products and services (Vollero et al., 2016). This can be detrimental to a company's reputation, since the basis of any consumer relationship relies heavily on trust.

The harmful impact of greenwashing is immense, as companies who adopt greenwashing practices disseminate misleading communication in efforts to make audiences believe they are taking steps toward sustainable solutions when they are simply using CSR as a marketing scheme to increase profit and maintain a good public image. An increasing number of organizations have been accused of making CSR claims on environmental issues but not following up with any concrete and measurable action (Gatti et al., 2019). In addition, since the adoption of CSR is voluntary and not a requirement for all companies, there often exists a lack of accountability and less motivation to deliver on promises. According to Gatti et al. (2019), "A totally voluntary and unregulated CSR approach facilitates the diffusion of greenwashing. Indeed, current predominant voluntary approaches create space for grey zones allowing for misleading communications" (p. 2). Consumers base their purchasing decisions largely on a company's advertising and messaging, and greenwashing threatens one's confidence in the marketing of products because it has become difficult to know what information is trustworthy (Chen & Chang, 2013). This results in some CSR communications being perceived positively and others being perceived negatively, regardless of the actual impacts of efforts.

There are various factors which determine whether CSR communication is perceived positively or negatively, one of them being the industry in which a company belongs to. If an industry is seen as untrustworthy, CSR efforts will likely not be successful (Viererbl & Koch, 2022). According to Nyilasy et al. (2014), some industries are inherently more risky than others in terms of environmental failure, so they are more prone to consumer skepticism around CSR efforts. For example, people are often more skeptical about the driving forces behind CSR for companies in the tobacco and oil industries (Du et al., 2010), as these industries tend to not take into consideration the health of people or the planet, and therefore, CSR attempts would likely be perceived as insincere. In their paper on CSR communications and perceived corporate greenwashing, Vries et al. (2015) examined why people may respond negatively when companies in the energy sector engage in CSR efforts intended to benefit the environment. They argue that energy companies might be inclined to communicate about environmental efforts due

to their concern for the health of the planet—this is referred to as a public-serving motive, which showcases concern for a collective interest such as the environment—to convey a sense of environmental responsibility (Vries et al., 2015). However, since the company's core business is the creation and consumption of energy, which tends to be viewed as a depletion of natural resources, people may be suspicious about the truthfulness of their CSR claims because they do not trust the company's authenticity and suspect that ulterior motives may be involved (Vries et al., 2015). Because of this, they emphasize that companies in the energy sector must critically think about the ways in which they communicate about their CSR efforts to reduce skepticism that exists due to their industry-type (Vries et al., 2015). This paper builds off the findings in the literature, which suggest that some industries are perceived more negatively than others, by exploring how the communication methods employed by marketing practitioners vary based on the different industries they work for to avoid the risk of greenwashing.

A situational example of how some industries are perceived more negatively when they engage in CSR is when the largest and most profitable tobacco company changed its name from Philip Morris Companies to The Altria Group and integrated a marketing strategy to improve its corporate image, and many people questioned the sincerity of their motives (Smith & Malone, 2003). The name change was intended to give the company a fresh start and rid them of the negative connotation associated with the Philip Morris name, and the company claimed they were working towards becoming a more responsible corporate citizen (Smith & Malone, 2003). However, The Altria Group spent more money on publicizing their philanthropy efforts than actually investing in health and safety programs, which demonstrated that they cared more about their image than the negative impact their products had on the wellbeing of consumers (Smith & Malone, 2003). This situation proves that the extent to which CSR efforts are communicated can also impact public perception. Although it is necessary to inform consumers and other interested parties about the positive work being done by a company, too much communication can have an adverse effect and lead to negative consequences and skepticism regarding motives (Viererbl & Koch, 2022). With these greenwashing risks in mind, marketing practitioners can work to find communication solutions for common concerns and reduce greenwashing skepticism in CSR.

3.5 Reducing Greenwashing Skepticism in CSR Communications

While people want to know about the good deeds companies are doing, they can also be very cynical when it comes to CSR, for fear that greenwashing or ulterior motives are involved (Schmeltz, 2012, Viererbl & Koch, 2022, and Du et al., 2010). It has been found that intrinsic communication—that is, companies who show a genuine concern for the issue they are claiming to support—leads to more positive inferences and public perception (Du et al., 2010). However, there has been an increasing tolerance of extrinsic motives—when companies attempt to increase profit—as more people are willing to accept that CSR can be a win-win situation, in which a company can serve the needs of the environment and society while also satisfying the bottom line of their business (Du et al., 2010). Some research suggests that suspicions of greenwashing can be reduced if a company communicates economic motives for investing in CSR while acknowledging that these efforts can also serve their firm in positive ways (Vries et al., 2015). With that being said, perception towards CSR communication depends on the type of message that is being shared with audiences.

According to Du et al. (2010), when CSR messages are about social, environmental, or economic issues and not a company's product or service, "consumers are more likely to be suspicious of ulterior motives, because such advertising does not fit their 'schemer schema'" (p. 10). They recommend that companies communicate about their lack of self-interest when dealing with these issues to reduce the chances of consumers believing they are engaging in CSR for their personal benefit. They further provide a conceptual framework of CSR communication to help communication and marketing practitioners reduce consumer skepticism and highlight positive corporate motives. Having a framework for CSR communication can help alleviate some of the greenwashing risks involved in marketing CSR by outlining the best methods and channels of communication to use for the greatest chance of receiving positive feedback and establishing trust. Another avenue of research that this study explores are the appeal types that marketing practitioners use to communicate about CSR efforts to their audiences. Using the correct appeal type for a given campaign is important, as it can help ensure the message is perceived positively by consumers.

It can be challenging for companies to build trust with consumers when communicating about environmental initiatives. As discovered in Chen and Chang's (2013) study on greenwashing and green trust, consumers are often confused when faced with products that claim to reduce environmental impacts due to a general lack of transparency within marketing, which leads to mistrust and abandonment of the product. The authors state that marketers must lower the perceptions of greenwashing every chance they have by using a reliable information channel to build more effective environmental claims. Similarly, Parguel et al. (2015) found that even knowledgeable consumers cannot build a well-rounded perception of a company's CSR efforts if there is an absence of environmental information to provide evidence of concrete impact. Therefore, it is critical that CSR communications provide supporting evidence to back claims and address any doubts consumers may have about a product or service.

Similar to the findings by Parguel et al. (2015), a survey by Schmeltz (2012) discovered that consumers favour CSR communication when it is "personally relevant and factually based", rather than when it focuses on society-centered values (p. 29). This causes an even greater communication challenge since it is almost impossible to appease each individual consumers' values. This finding suggests the importance of understanding the audience you are communicating with so values can be aligned accordingly for the most optimal reaction. Further, to reduce the risk of skepticism, Schmeltz (2012) suggests using clear and evidence-driven language while also aligning a company's core business with its CSR initiatives. In agreement, Bernardino (2021) argues that to avoid greenwashing in CSR communication, practitioners must show a clear alignment between their message and a company's main mission. Failing to do so may result in the perception that the initiative is not sincere and is simply a form of greenwashing.

Much of the literature surrounding greenwashing in CSR communications encouraged marketing and communication practitioners to continue communicating about CSR, so long as they employ transparency, align their business values appropriately, and showcase that they are doing what they preach. Results from Nyilasy et al.'s (2014) study based on attribution theory demonstrate that green advertising can backfire on a company if there is no concrete action to backup claims, and in these instances, companies are better off not communicating about

environmental efforts until they have first improved their corporate environmental performance. It is instead suggested that improving corporate environmental performance is a better investment, as it can reduce reputational risk (Nyilasy et al., 2014). The channels used to inform interested parties about environmental efforts is another important aspect of CSR communications, as the source through which CSR is communicated greatly influences the credibility and trustworthiness of the information (Eberle et al., 2013). Eberle et al. (2013) found that interactive CSR communication improves message credibility and establishes feelings of identification among interested parties. In addition, people who identify with a company are more likely to talk about their positive CSR efforts and engage with their initiatives (Eberle et al., 2013).

Some interesting findings come from a study on the mediating role of skepticism in CSR and how corporate social advocacy (CSA) can help build a stronger reputation for a company (Park, 2021). Park (2021) suggests that general CSR activities can cause public skepticism because of their generic nature—such as supporting issues with widespread social backing like climate action—but taking a definitive stance on controversial socio-political issues through CSA can showcase sincerity and lead to greater brand trust and loyalty. Their findings suggest that consumers are more likely to identify with a company when clear messages are communicated about their CSA efforts. Additionally, their results show that if consumers identify with a company's identity, as shown through CSA, they are less skeptical about non-market activities (Park, 2021). Most importantly, showcasing social advocacy can improve the sincerity of CSR claims and help consumers and other interested parties identify more strongly with a brand.

3.6 Social Media as a Tool for CSR Communications

For companies who find value in communicating about CSR efforts, they may choose to embrace the possibilities of social media channels to do so. Social media "enable informal, interactive, and publicly visible CSR communication" in affordable and efficient ways, as well as provide channels to create and engage in dialogue surrounding CSR (Stohl et al., 2017, p. 414). Social media provide companies with the opportunity to engage with the public on a deeper level than what is possible through traditional media channels, since social media are more personal, provide a direct line of communication, and engage with a two-stream communication style. This interactivity can increase message credibility and consumer identification with a company, which can reduce skepticism of motives when CSR efforts are communicated and significantly improve reputation (Eberle et al., 2013). A stronger reputation can increase the positive perception of CSR efforts, because consumers will find information to be more trustworthy.

Social media can also increase the scrutiny of CSR communications due to the wide access to information available at the tips of consumers' fingers, which makes it easier to detect greenwashing (Lyon & Montgomery, 2013) and rapidly share information about it online. Additionally, in contrast to the interactivity benefits that some scholars argue social media provides (Stohl 2017, Eberle et al. 2013), others argue that consumer engagement with CSR communications on social media has declined and companies are not successfully taking advantage of the opportunities these tools provide (Fernández et al., 2022). This may be due to a

lack of understanding of CSR content sharing drivers and how to tap into them and capitalize on the interactions they can encourage (Fernández et al., 2022). Drivers that have the ability to promote interactivity with social media campaigns related to CSR include CSR-fit (i.e., company/brand/consumer-fit), CSR empowerment and co-creation, and humane-oriented CSR emotional appeals (Fernández et al., 2022). Although using social media as channels for CSR communication has risks, rather than viewing them as vehicles for exposing harmful information about a company's CSR efforts, they should instead be valued for their ability to showcase transparency, foster dialogue (Stohl et al., 2017), and hold firms accountable to disclose both positive and negative environmental impacts (Lyon & Montgomery, 2013). Social media platforms have also been recently used as mediums to easily and affordably showcase a company's political, environmental, and social stance on various topics such as pro-choice rallies, the Black Lives Matter movement, animal cruelty in the beauty industry, and many more.

While there is pressure for companies to communicate about their environmental efforts due to the high public interest in CSR, it is imperative that companies avoid falling into the trap of greenwashing through practices like using the proper communication tools, such as social media platforms (Eberle et al., 2013, Stohl et al., 2017, and Lyon & Montgomery, 2013). Another area of research this study explores is the social media platforms marketing practitioners use to communicate about CSR efforts. These findings will help build off the literature on CSR and social media as they will demonstrate how the researcher's sample relies on these tools.

Chapter 4: Methodology

The researcher conducted a study using a survey which consisted of multiple-choice questions, Likert scale questions, and open-ended questions to better understand the processes and methods used when communicating about CSR and how marketing practitioners establish trust with consumers. The researcher further employed an explorative content analysis on the open-ended survey responses for this study because it allows for a focus on "the characteristics of language as communication with attention to the content or contextual meaning of the text" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278) to identify commonalities and differences between the open-ended survey responses from the sample of marketing practitioners. An explorative content analysis is the most appropriate approach as it will identify responses to the three research questions outlined at the start of this paper: 1) What factors contribute to both positive and negative consumer responses to CSR communication?, 2) How do marketing practitioners communicate about CSR to avoid the perception of greenwashing?, and 3) How can organizations increase trust and be transparent with the public about their motivations behind CSR communication? The answers to these questions were illuminated through an exploratory content analysis of all the responses to open-ended questions that marketing practitioners provided in the survey. The findings from the open-ended responses helped provide a deeper context to the findings from the various multiple-choice and Likert scale questions and establish clear themes and commonalities and or differences within previous literature.

4.1 Data Collection

This study conducted an online survey through Qualtrics, which took participants approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete. Participants in this study (N = 22) included

Canadian marketing practitioners with specific experience developing CSR-related marketing campaigns. Survey participants were recruited using a nonprobability snowball sampling technique, in which participants shared the survey link with other marketers whom they believed were interested in participating. Nonprobability methods of sampling a population—in the case of this study; Canadian marketing practitioners—"involve samples that are available to the researcher or are selected by the researcher" (Naderifar et al., 2017, p. 2). One method for nonprobability sampling is convenience sampling, which was used for this study in the form of a snowball sampling technique. This sampling method is often implemented for research when accessing specific subjects with target characteristics is challenging, therefore, subjects are recruited based on the researcher's contacts who then recruit future subjects within their acquaintances until the desired sample size is achieved (Naderifar et al., 2017). A snowball sampling technique was used for this study because it was important to reach Canadian marketing practitioners with specific experience working on CSR-related campaigns, and the initial survey respondents could be recruited through the researcher's contacts. The survey was circulated in May of 2022 and remained open until the target number of survey responses was reached, which was in September of 2022. A full list of the survey questions asked can be found in the Appendices.

4.2 Data Analysis

The first step the researcher took in the data analysis process was to read and re-read the responses provided by marketing practitioners in the survey. This helped get a better sense of the "whole picture" and gain a general understanding of the information participants were sharing (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). Doing this also helped the researcher start to form ideas of the main points that were being communicated. After becoming familiar with the data and drawing preliminary connections between the quantitative findings and the qualitative findings from the open-ended responses, the researcher began gathering metrics such as the marketing appeal types used, the frequency of CSR communication, the social media platforms leveraged, and so on to provide additional context relevant to the researcher's final conclusions. These metrics were then supplemented by the data provided in the open-ended responses to help identify commonalities among the marketing practitioners' opinions and experiences as well as develop key themes.

Chapter 5: Findings

5.1 Sample Profile

A total of 22 adults residing in Canada competed the survey. Of the sample, 40.91% were female and 31.82% were male. The remainder of the sample (27.28%) did not disclose the gender they identify with. The survey participants ranged in ages from 25 to 61 and up. Participants aged 25-39 made up 22.72% of the sample, participants aged 40-60 made up 40.91%, and participants aged 61 and older made up 9.10%. The remainder of the sample (27.28%) did not disclose their age range. 18.18% of survey respondents said they work as a freelance marketer, and 54.55% said they work for a marketing agency. When asked how long they have worked in the marketing and communications field, 4.55% said less than one to three years, 4.55% said seven to nine years, and 63.64% said 10 or more years. Regarding the length of time the survey participants have worked on CSR-related marketing campaigns, 4.55% said

they have one to three years of experience, 9.09% have four to six years of experience, 18.18% have seven to nine years of experience, and 36.36% have 10 or more years of experience. These metrics showcase that the majority of survey respondents have at least a decade of related-work experience, which indicates that they have a thorough understanding of best communication practices and experience working on a variety of marketing campaigns.

5.2 Survey Results

5.2.1 Understanding of CSR

This section includes the results from the survey which are structured in a way to address the research questions: 1) What factors contribute to both positive and negative consumer responses to CSR communication?, 2) How do marketing practitioners communicate about CSR to avoid the perception of greenwashing?, and 3) How can organizations increase trust and be transparent with the public about their motivations behind CSR communication? A few initial questions were posed to the survey respondents to gain an understanding of their perception and general understanding of CSR. Survey respondents were first asked what CSR as a concept includes for them. The top responses included supporting communities (17 responses), engaging in philanthropy work (16 responses), helping the environment (16 responses), and providing business transparency (16 responses). The options with the least amount of responses included improving employee welfare (12 responses) and supporting the supply chain (12 responses), however, considering 12 responses is still over 50% of the sample, these results indicate that respondents believe CSR involves a wide-variety of focuses. The marketing practitioners were then asked to select from the same list of CSR focuses that they believe their clients—being the companies they create campaigns for—care most about. Among the top responses were helping the environment (14 responses) and supporting communities (13 responses). The focus areas with the lowest number of responses included supporting the supply chain (7 responses), providing business transparency (9 responses), and improving employee welfare (9 responses). A comparison between what CSR as a concept includes for the marketing practitioners and what they believe their clients care most about can be seen in Figure 1. These results indicate that there is a difference between how this concept is understood and what it's most important features are. As mentioned earlier in this paper, CSR is an evolving and multi-faceted term which could mean integrating more sustainability principles (Thompson, 2019) for one business, and responding to external demands from stakeholders (Karwowski & Raulinajtys-Grzybek, 2021) for another. The findings from this study suggest that marketing practitioners believe CSR should focus fairly equally on supporting communities, engaging in philanthropy, helping the environment, and providing business transparency, while companies tend to focus more on wanting to help the environment and support communities above all else.

When asked for their opinion on the statement "CSR has become an important topic of focus in marketing campaigns", 36% of marketing practitioners said they strongly agree, 45% said they somewhat agree, 14% said they neither agree nor disagree, and 5% said they strongly disagree. Respondents were then asked to elaborate on their answer and explain why they chose the level of agreement they did. One respondent said "I wish it was a bigger focus, but it feels like it's just starting to become important." In some level of agreement, another respondent stated "I don't think the majority of companies use CSR in marketing campaigns but it's

definitely increasing." Another respondent shared "Because it is important, but hasn't reached enough people in relevant positions." For those that agreed more strongly with the statement that CSR has become an important focus in marketing campaigns, they elaborated by stating "Corporations need to be held accountable to ethical practices. Consumers demanding this via how they spend their money is essential for change" and "When consumers are in the position to choose a new brand to work with if cost, and rating are not the core choice pattern then connecting with the brand is the next step. They are getting what they need from a company that matches what their values are." As illuminated in some of these responses, the value a brand can offer consumers through CSR efforts is crucial for campaigns to be successful. This finding supports previous research which suggests that linking CSR efforts with the values of consumers can be advantageous for companies (Peloza & Shange, 2011). Furthermore, another respondent shared "As a creative in advertising, I've noticed that the focus on cause marketing has steadily increased year over year since about 2015. The vast majority of major awards go to CSR initiatives, so naturally the industry focuses its sites there." The awareness of CSR becoming increasingly more relevant in marketing was echoed by another respondent, who stated "I think that in the last 2 years (since the start of the pandemic) there has been a lot of focus on 'the greater good' and how we can help others in whatever means we can. I think that a lot of people, especially Gen Z, are looking for companies to make big statements/dedications and actions towards 'the greater good'." The relevancy of CSR in the field of marketing is something that appeared in much of the literature reviewed for this paper, which can be seen in the growing CSR budgets of firms and the overall growth of global environmental, social, and governance investing (Bernardino, 2021). Additionally, this finding is aligned with the fact that more companies are publishing CSR reports now than ever before (Governance & Accountability Institute, 2021), indicating that consumer demand is being translated into greater efforts on the behalf of companies showcasing dedication to corporate responsibility.

To get an even greater understanding of how the sample of marketing practitioners view the growth of CSR, they were asked "How has the marketing approach to CSR changed in the last 5 years?" Some respondents shared the sentiment that CSR has become more of a priority for businesses, and therefore, has become more of a priority for marketing practitioners. For example, one respondent said "CSR programming is much more common given that brands understand consumers expect them to contribute to the greater good." Others said "Corps have recognized that consumers are developing a moral conscience in how they spend their money. It's always a good brand efficacy message to help brands stand out" and "Doing good is no longer considered as much of a nice to have as it once was. It is now mainstream, an expectation and a much more common practice." Other respondents touched on the idea that some companies are engaging in CSR marketing as a way to keep up with consumer demand, something that was brought forward in the literature as well. As Bernadino (2021) states in their paper on how to avoid greenwashing in CSR communications, public interest in CSR is unusually high, and "To survive and remain sustainable, corporations need to revise their mode of operations and reflect on how they can and should create a positive impact for society and the environment" (p. 103). In their responses, one practitioner stated "Companies are much more apt to put out CSR claims...whether they're true or not", another said "Everyone jumps on a bandwagon. CAUSE is not the same as PURPOSE" and yet another respondent shared "Brands feel the need to wade into the waters. Some do it better than others, but they all feel the need to. Issue is, not all have a worthwhile message to convey." Some respondents felt that although

there are companies who engage in CSR as a way to keep up with consumer demand rather than create positive advancements in sustainability, consumers have become more aware of which messages to trust and which ones to be weary of. One respondent said "There is more awareness of virtue signalling and brands are being called out on it", and another shared "There are plenty of orgs that like to take about being green but lack execution, I think in the last 5 years consumers have begun to get smart to that." On the same tone, one respondent stated "Gen Z is a more socially conscious generation and as they get older, they are looking for companies to take action, not just release statements." These results indicate that marketing practitioners are aware of something previous literature has argued, which is that consumers may observe companies engaging in greenwashing if they perceive that they are not doing what they are preaching (Nyilasy et al., 2014). This acknowledgement of consumer awareness regarding greenwashing is critical for marketers to keep in mind when working on CSR campaigns, so they can develop effective communication strategies that minimize this risk. Lastly, participants were asked to identify, in their opinion, what some of the benefits and challenges of working on CSR campaigns are, which will be explored in the following section.

5.2.2 Benefits and Challenges of Working on CSR Campaigns

A key feature of this study is to understand what marketing practitioners view as both benefits and challenges of working on CSR-related campaigns. Respondents were asked to identify these features, and the full responses to these questions are outlined in Table 2. A response that appeared to be consistent across the sample surrounded the fact that CSR has the ability to create positive environmental change and use business as a force of good, beyond simply driving sales and increasing profit. Similarly, some respondents shared that this type of work provides them with a sense of purpose and makes them feel like they are contributing in some way to the greater good. It is clear why marketing practitioners feel this way, since CSR involves advancing social good beyond what is required by the law (Kang et al., 2016) and taking the initiative to give back to society and the environment. As Du et al. (2010) mention, CSR plays an important role in the global corporate agenda and its aim to advance into a more socially conscious environment, as it holds companies accountable for the environmental impacts of their business processes. Another benefit that was identified is that CSR campaigns can help target environmentally conscious consumers, which companies want to attract to help build an audience that is accepting and encouraging of CSR efforts. This benefit was mentioned in the literature review of this paper, which found that CSR efforts can enhance the reputation of companies (Viererbl & Koch, 2022) while also increasing brand champions and ambassadors (Du et al., 2010) who want to support positive initiatives. Several studies focus specifically on the positive benefits of CSR for consumers, such as Alhouti & D'Souza's (2018) study, which found that consumers can benefit from engaging in CSR through their purchasing decisions in ways of spirituality, efficiency, aesthetics, and status. As one respondent shared, CSR campaigns can strengthen the relationship between conscious consumers and a company, which can influence other companies to follow in their footsteps.

Although many benefits of working on CSR campaigns were identified, survey respondents also shared some of the challenges they face. One of the most common challenges that was identified was that marketing practitioners find it difficult to find the balance between claims and providing evidence to back them up, and providing enough information but not

overwhelming audiences. This is a valid concern, and the literature does acknowledge this as a challenge in CSR communications. For example, Chen and Chang's (2013) study on greenwashing and green trust argues that when consumers are faced with products that claim to reduce environmental impacts, they often do not know whether or not to trust the claims, due to a general lack of transparency within marketing, which leads to mistrust and abandonment of the product. Because of this, they argue that providing sufficient evidence to showcase that positive changes are actually taking place is critical. Similarly, the study conducted by Parguel et al. (2015) found that consumers cannot build a well-rounded perception of a company's CSR efforts if there is an absence of environmental information to provide evidence of concrete impact. Respondents also identified engagement with CSR messages from management, investors, and even employees to sometimes be a challenge. Social media was identified in the literature review as a popular tool to leverage for gaining stronger engagement with audiences. Some scholars have argued that consumer engagement with CSR communications on social media has declined and companies are not successfully taking advantage of the opportunities these tools can provide, which may be due to a lack of understanding of CSR content sharing drivers and how to capitalize on interactivity (Fernández et al., 2022). There are drivers that have the ability to promote interactivity with CSR campaigns, such as CSR empowerment and humane-oriented CSR emotional appeals (Fernández et al., 2022), which can be incorporated into messages to boost engagement with audiences. The finding that engagement with CSR efforts is a challenge for some marketing practitioners signifies that this should an important area of focus when developing CSR messages, so practitioners can increase interactivity with campaigns which will increase their success rate.

5.2.3 Contributing Factors to Positive and Negative CSR Response

A key result from this study is that 100% of survey participants agreed there is an increasing demand for companies to engage in environmental initiatives. At the same time, 94% of participants believe there has been an increase in scrutiny from the public regarding firms' environmental initiatives (Figure 2). This finding supports findings in the literature which indicate that although there is an increasing demand for companies to showcase CSR efforts, there is also an increase in the amount of consumers who are skeptical of motives when CSR claims are made (Du et al., 2010, Connors et al., 2017, and Xu & Kochigina, 2021). From the survey responses, it is suggested that marketing practitioners are aware of the growing demands and skepticism regarding CSR, therefore, delivering on the desire for environmental action while also finding ways to reduce the risk of greenwashing communications is especially important.

To elaborate on this finding, survey respondents were asked what factors they believe contribute to negative public perception of CSR campaigns. Some of the responses included "When it's known that the company isn't doing what it says", "When they clearly see that you are trying to use the message to your own benefit", "False claims", "Lack of connection to overall brand, disjointed brand voice", "Too self-promoting", and "Doing things too far afield from what the company actually does. Lack of background data. Claims that are too bold." Another respondent shared a sentiment that was brought forward earlier in the survey, when asked how the approach to CSR has changed over the last 5 years. They stated that negative perception from the public can be caused by "jumping on a CSR 'trend' - a lot of companies/organizations will

post statements/release campaigns that are purely just performative but their policies/actions etc. do not match what is being said in the statement."

Survey respondents were also asked to identify some of the factors they believe contribute to positive perception of CSR communications. These included "Transparency", "Not having a guilt or shame message, not being too much didactic", "Being able to back up the message we're putting out into market.", "Making positive mainstream, digital, and social news supporting your endeavor", "Consistency in messaging and proof of action", and "Making the information easy to find and digest." One respondent emphasized the need for action, by stating "Actions always perform better than words or statements. Companies that have solid actionable steps on how they are personally going to contribute to a CSR campaign typically perform better." Another respondent touched on the need for a greater focus on data, sharing "campaigns backed by strong data and deep understanding of the issues by the client doing the work. Consumers can tell if something is fluffy or substantive."

To get an understanding of how different audiences have reacted to CSR campaigns created by the marketing practitioners in the sample, they were asked to rate the usual reaction of consumers, investors, and employees based on their experiences. For consumers, 8 respondents said they react very positively and 12 respondents said they react somewhat positively. For investors, 8 respondents said they react very positively, 4 respondents said they react somewhat positively, 4 respondents said they react neither positively or negatively, and 1 respondent said they react somewhat negatively. Lastly, for employees, 10 respondents said they react very positively, 9 respondents said they react somewhat positively, and 1 respondent said they react neither positively or negatively. One respondent elaborated on their responses, by sharing "Employees often feel pride in the fact that the company is making an effort. Investors recognize the value, but are less enthusiastic. Consumers are often skeptical, but are more likely to buy/support your brand if they believe in what you're doing." Respondents were then asked to share an example of a reaction they received to one of their CSR campaigns, to gain a deeper understanding of how their CSR messages were perceived. One respondent said "We had some social ads receive many comments questioning the validity of our claims but we knew we were being authentic and worked with the client to answer all those concerns." Another shared that they are "Currently working on a carbon-neutral meat company's launch. Most reactions have been very positive", and yet another respondent stated that the reaction a consumer had to a CSR campaign was "Wow! I had no idea the organization was doing so much."

5.2.4 Communicating to Avoid the Perception of Greenwashing

A major goal of this study was to gain a better understanding of how marketing practitioners communicate with audiences about CSR efforts and the methods they implement to avoid the perception of engaging in greenwashing. Because of this, a large portion of the survey consisted of questions regarding how often marketing practitioners communicate about CSR, the media they use to communicate about CSR, and how they avoid greenwashing. The survey respondents were first asked which social media and traditional media they use to communicate with consumers, investors, and the general public about CSR (Figure 3 and Figure 4). Marketing practitioners identified that they use social media and digital advertising more than traditional media—such as newspapers and print advertising—to communicate about CSR. Specifically,

marketing practitioners use Facebook and Instagram to disseminate information about environmental initiatives. As found by Eberle et al. (2013), social media provide an opportunity for interactivity among a company and its consumers, which can increase message credibility, consumer identification, and significantly improve a firm's reputation. This survey finding suggests that marketing practitioners are aware of the importance of selecting the proper communication channels for sharing information about CSR efforts, and they are taking advantage of the many benefits social media can provide. In addition to where marketers communicate about CSR, they were asked how often they communicate about these topics with their audiences (Figure 5). It was identified that most respondents share information about CSR initiatives less than once a week, which is aligned with evidence that suggests over-sharing information could lead to the perception of greenwashing, as too much communication can have an adverse effect and lead to negative consequences and skepticism regarding motives (Viererbl & Koch, 2022 and Vollero et al., 2016).

Another important area to explore in the survey was the marketing appeal types that respondents use in their CSR communications. When asked to identify these marketing appeal types, 13 respondents said they use pride appeal, 11 said they use compassion appeal, 11 said they use gratitude appeal, and 9 said they use empathy appeal. There were some appeal types that received less responses. Only 2 respondents said that they use fear appeal, 2 said they use guilt appeal, 3 respondents said they use shame appeal, 3 said they use anger appeal, and 3 said they use relief appeal. Overall, these findings indicate that marketing practitioners use a variety of appeal types when developing CSR campaigns. This finding aligns with previous research which argues that relying on one appeal type is less effective than using a variety of appeals (Peloza & Shang, 2011).

Following this, the survey respondents were asked several questions about the risk of greenwashing and how it impacts their work when communicating about CSR. When asked if they fear that their work on CSR campaigns may be perceived as greenwashing, 10 respondents said yes and 9 respondents said no. 3 survey participants choose to not answer. Those who answered yes to that question were then asked if their fear of greenwashing accusations makes them hesitant to communicate about CSR. 7 respondents said that they are hesitant to communicate about CSR due to the fear of being accused of greenwashing, and 3 respondents said they are not hesitant.

Lastly, respondents were asked what safeguards they put in place to avoid greenwashing when communicating to audiences about a company's CSR efforts. Some of the responses included "Knowing what we're talking about", "Keeping it to facts", "Transparency", and "Sharing proof." One respondent shared "The company I work for has strict guidelines in place. We also use the right ESG research companies to support our initiatives" and another stated "Being straight up about limitations, honest about not being perfect, being honest about expectations, not overpromising, gaining internal commitment before making external announcements." Another approach shared by one respondent was to "Try to get 'tiers' of information - what will the experts want to see? What will informed consumers want to see? What will the general public want to see? Communicate the same message to each tier with varying levels of detail."

5.2.5 Increasing Transparency in CSR Communications

       The final section of the survey focused on how the marketing practitioners aim to increase transparency in their CSR communications and establish a sense of trust between the company and its audiences, as well as the ways in which their communication methods may or may not change depending on the industry they are working for. Respondents said they establish trust with consumers by "Showing real results", "With facts / key figures that are easily verifiable", by showcasing "transparency and objective setting", "By telling the truth", "Sharing examples", "Keeping it to facts", and "Becoming relatable, down-to-earth, share genuine interest." Further, one respondent said "Don't overdo it. Don't use short-term motivators like fear and guilt" and another shared that they approach CSR communication by "Listening to and being prepared to respond to feedback; stick with the program." Another respondent said that they "Ensure that what we say is true and that what we say we're going to do gets done", and another sentiment that was shared was to "Communicate with humility. We're not saving the world, we're just doing our part. Include a forward-looking message like 'there's still more to be done'." As discussed in previous research, if CSR is not presented transparently, consumers may accuse companies of engaging in greenwashing as a way to deflect attention from their unethical practices and reap the benefits of increased consumer loyalty (Vollero et al., 2016). The results from this survey indicate that practitioners have a good understanding of the factors that lead to positive consumer perception and the importance of transparency within CSR communications.

       Respondents were asked the same question but in regards to how they establish trust with external stakeholders or investors. Some of the responses included using "Real results with statistics, metrics, KPIs, goals", by showing "Transparency and objective setting", "By telling the truth", by "Sharing examples and having transparency", and by using "Numbers with sprinkles of emotional connections." One respondent said that rigour is an important aspect when dealing with this audience, and that it is important to "Show them you're invested and they'll invest." Another respondent said that they "engage in meaningful dialogue and consultation with receptive stakeholders willing to do the same", and another shared "Show the 'receipts' by having within the site the background details that experts/stakeholders would care about."

       Lastly, the marketing practitioners were asked if their communication methods change depending on the industry they are conducting CSR work for. 16 respondents said their strategies do change, and 1 respondent said they do not change their strategies. 5 survey participants did not choose to answer. For those who stated that their marketing strategies do differ depending on the industry their client belongs to, they were asked to elaborate on how they adapt their communication methods. Some of the responses included "Benchmarking and nomenclature", adapting plans "based on product and target", and "Each strategy should be specific and custom-created for every brand in every sector." One respondent shared "I work in the energy market, and environmental strategies are huge for us, especially as we get more into renewables." Another said "Automotive is more sensitive than not-for-profit. You have to know what people think of the company in order to know how to talk to them to help move the needle in the right direction." Another respondent shared a similar view, stating "For automotive, we're more conservative due to the damage the industry has done. For telecommunications, we provide evidence of what we've done to show we can accomplish what we're proposing. And for health,

we appeal to the universal truth that better healthcare means better health for all." "You have to know your audience, common political standing of the industry, geography, age all impact how we communicate and how 'passionately' we communicate", shared another respondent.

Following this, the marketing practitioners were asked if they notice differences in responses to CSR communications depending on the industry they are communicating about. One respondent said "It all depends on the story you're telling and the relevance to the community/audience you're targeting." 11 respondents said yes, and some elaborated by sharing that they find a "Huge difference between non-profit initiatives and public response and big companies with little response", and others said "Some sectors are treated with greater suspicion then others", "People are more receptive if they don't have their immediate livelihood depending on crude oil", and "People are substantially less likely to believe the automotive industry when it comes to CSR." As noted in previous studies, some industries are perceived with more caution when CSR efforts are promoted due to the negative impact their business has on the environment (Nyilasy et al., 2014, Viererbl & Koch, 2022, and Du et al., 2010). The results from the survey confirm these findings and demonstrate that marketing practitioners are aware of how industry-type impacts the effectiveness of CSR claims and the importance of adapting communication methods to alleviate this risk.

Chapter 6: Discussion

It is clear through a review of the literature that the risk of greenwashing is a common concern for consumers, investors, the general public, and marketing practitioners when faced with increasing demand for companies to showcase greater environmental and social responsibility efforts. While there is a greater push for the integration of CSR in today's marketing campaigns, they are also faced with a higher degree of scrutiny due to the growing cases of greenwashing. Because of this, marketing practitioners are confronted with a difficult challenge to balance the demands for corporate responsibility with the risk of being perceived as engaging in environmental deception. In this study, 22 marketing practitioners participated in a survey which gathered data to gain an understanding of the level of hesitation they experience when communicating about CSR due to the fear of being accused of greenwashing, as well as the methods and strategies they put in place to establish trust and transparency with consumers. The results highlighted similarities with the literature reviewed for this paper, as well as brought forward interesting insights from a marketer's point-of-view, which to the knowledge of the researcher, have not all been explored in previous studies.

Most of the marketing practitioners agreed that CSR has become an important focus in marketing campaigns, however, there is a lack of alignment between what companies are wanting to focus their communications on and what marketers believe are important consumer demands that need to be addressed. This misalignment was further highlighted when marketers were asked how the approach to CSR communication has changed over the last five years. A few respondents shared that some companies are wanting to showcase CSR efforts to keep up with consumer demand, but do not have evidence behind their claims to support what they are saying. This theme was heavily echoed when respondents shared the challenges they face when working on CSR campaigns. Among the highest responses was that marketers are worried CSR communication may be perceived as greenwashing if companies are not doing what they say

they are doing. Many respondents emphasized that a challenge they face is finding a balance between making CSR claims and providing tangible evidence. This concern is validated by the findings in Nyilasy et al.'s (2014) study, which found that CSR efforts can negatively impact a company's reputation if claims are not backed up with concrete action. These findings suggest that although there is some misalignment between what marketers believe to be important when communicating about CSR and what companies believe, it is critical for the reputation of a brand that all CSR claims are substantiated with concrete evidence to prove that action is being taken. If companies make this a top priority when working with markers to develop CSR campaigns, marketing practitioners may feel less hesitant to communicate about CSR because the fear of greenwashing accusations can be alleviated.

The main findings to come from the data collected in the survey are threefold. Firstly, CSR claims that appear to be too self-promoting and intended to benefit the company rather than the cause they say they are supporting may receive more negative reception from consumers, because they may believe that claims are simply efforts to increase profit for the company and not benefit the environment. While it is possible for CSR efforts to benefit the environment and also produce multi-faceted business returns for companies, as explained by Du et al. (2010), it is important to communicate a lack of self-interest so consumers can trust that companies are engaging in CSR for the right reasons. Communicating about a company's lack of self-interest may also help reduce the perception that they are engaging in greenwashing, because a claim that does not showcase personal benefit could increase trust and be regarded as more sincere. Factors that contribute to positive perception of CSR, as identified by the marketing practitioners in this study, include supporting claims with strong data and being transparent with audiences. These findings are aligned with what respondents also identified as challenges in CSR communication. While it is critical to be honest with audiences and provide them with information that proves action is being taken when CSR claims are made, it is also challenging for marketers to provide evidence in a way that is easily digestible for most audiences and shows consistency among other claims. To address this challenge and ensure that CSR campaigns are created with the greatest chance of successful intake, marketers could use a conceptual framework—such as the one developed by Du et al. (2010)—to alleviate greenwashing risks and outline the best methods of communication to use. Companies would also benefit in tracking metrics for their environmental efforts and developing goals with actionable steps to achieve them, as this information could be included in CSR campaigns to improve validity and trustworthiness.

Secondly, marketers rely more on positive marketing appeal types such as pride and compassion over appeal types that may provoke fear or guilt in their CSR campaigns. This finding is aligned with findings from Green and Peloza's (2011) study which indicate that one of the ways in which consumers experience CSR value is through feeling positively about supporting a CSR initiative and showcasing their dedication to environmental sustainability. If consumers perceive CSR campaigns more positively when they experience emotions such as pride, relying on these appeal types when developing CSR campaigns could reduce the risk of greenwashing skepticism and ensure communication efforts are more successful. One way to achieve this is to leverage social media platforms. As can be seen in the results, the marketing practitioners who participated in this study use social media more than traditional media when communicating to audiences about CSR. Social media provide opportunities to engage with audiences on a deeper and more personal level than what can be achieved through traditional

media, and the ability for consumers to be public about the companies and values they support can help establish a sense of pride, which will benefit the reception of CSR campaigns.

In addition, to avoid greenwashing skepticism, respondents shared that they aim to showcase evidence, be transparent in their communications, and tailor messages to the specific audience they are targeting. These findings indicate that the marketing practitioners who participated in this study have a good understanding of the best communication methods to use for the most optimal reception of CSR campaigns, as it is important not to over communicate about efforts and maintain a level of honesty in communications to prevent consumers from suspecting that ulterior motives are involved.

Thirdly, the efforts of marketing practitioners to increase transparency and establish trust with their audiences differs when they are communicating with consumers and when they are communicating with investors or other interested parties. With consumers, respondents echoed the methods they previously shared, which include providing verifiable facts, showcasing real results and actions, and not using short term motivators such as fear or guilt in their messaging. Another sentiment that was shared was trying to relay a sense of relatability and humility by showcasing that you are doing your part but there is still progress to be made. Doing this may help consumers understand that companies will always have room to improve, but a willingness to improve sustainability efforts and contribute to the environment are positive steps in the right direction.

Methods for establishing trust with investors and other interested parties seem to focus more on using metrics and setting objectives to showcase the value of participating in CSR initiatives. Some respondents mentioned consultation and meaningful dialogue as an important method for fostering trust, an advantage not as common with consumers who are more removed from the faces of a company. This awareness of changing communication methods and styles depending on the audience you are targeting was evident in discussions around different industries. Most of the respondents said their communication methods change depending on the industry they are conducting CSR work for. For example, it was identified that the automotive and oil sectors are faced with greater suspicion when environmental efforts are promoted, and therefore, communication methods must be adapted and more effort is needed to establish a sense of trust and transparency with audiences. As noted in the literature, some industries are faced with more risk than others in terms of environmental failure and health implications, such as the tobacco and oil industries, so they are more prone to consumer skepticism and mistrust around CSR efforts because they are likely to be perceived as insincere (Nyilasy et al., 2014, Viererbl & Koch, 2022, and Du et al., 2010). The findings from the survey, which are aligned with previous research (Schmeltz, 2012), indicate that marketing practitioners can increase transparency in CSR communications largely by tailoring their messages based on the audiences they are communicating to and the industries they are communicating on behalf of.

Chapter 7: Practical Implications

As evident in the research findings and discussion, there are several important contributions from this study. The practical implications include:

1) Creates a foundation for further exploration of marketing practitioners' hesitation when working on CSR communications.
2) Identifies major challenges for marketers when working on CSR campaigns.
3) Demonstrates how trust and transparency can be enhanced in CSR communications to reduce the risk of greenwashing and negative consumer perception.

The growing prominence of greenwashing in CSR communications makes it difficult for marketing practitioners to navigate ways to showcase environmental efforts while also reducing the risk of skepticism and mistrust among consumers and other interested parties. There is a growing field of research on green marketing and greenwashing, which is broadening our understanding of how consumers perceive CSR communications, but more research is required in order to develop stronger frameworks that marketing practitioners can use to create CSR campaigns that are transparent and provide actionable outcomes. The findings of this study make a valuable contribution to the literature surrounding greenwashing and CSR since most studies focus on consumer opinions of CSR, rather than marketing practitioners' experiences, which is necessary in order to identify new and underserved areas for future research and better understand how marketing practitioners can improve communication methods to further reduce greenwashing skepticism. This research addresses the gap in literature surrounding marketing practitioners' experiences with CSR-related campaigns by taking an exploratory approach on the issue of greenwashing from a marketer's point of view.

Chapter 8: Limitations and Future Research Suggestions

This study has some limitations, which offer several possible paths for future research to be conducted. Future research could further explore the degree to which marketers are worried about consumers and other interested parties' responses and skepticism regarding CSR. Another important area to be more deeply explored is how communication to avoid greenwashing may differ between various industries (e.g., automobile industry vs. tobacco industry). While this was touched upon in this paper, the researcher believes that the differences between industries and the preconceived level of trust one has with a company based on the industry they belong to is an important area of research that requires further investigation to have a more fulsome understanding of how industry type impacts greenwashing skepticism. Another avenue for future research could be an assessment of various companies who engage in CSR based on Van de Ven's (2008) CSR communication framework, discussed earlier in this paper. While the study conducted for this paper focused on the CSR experiences of marketing practitioners throughout their careers and with various companies and industries, a future study could explore the CSR communication practices of specific companies to determine which communication approach they adopt. An analysis of their CSR strategies and campaigns could then be conducted to determine which approach resulted in the most positive reception from consumers and the public.

Future research could also explore how to regain trust with consumers and the public if a company has engaged in greenwashing. Furthermore, it is important to note that this study focused on the experiences and communication methods of a small sample of marketing practitioners residing in Canada. Constraints such as time, budget, and scope resulted in this small sample size whose experiences and opinions of CSR communication are not indicative of the entire population of marketing practitioners working on CSR campaigns, rather, they provide

a snapshot of how some marketers are balancing the demand for environmental responsibility and skepticism surrounding greenwashing. Due to the exploratory nature of this study and its data collection, the research design of a snowball sampling method was adequate for achieving the research goals. This study finds preliminary patterns and evidence to build off of for future research opportunities. Overall, this research provides a starting point to further explore the degree to which marketers are worried about consumer response and skepticism, and how this hesitation can hinder CSR communications.

To enhance the validity of the findings that this paper presents, future research could expand data collection to include a larger sample of marketing practitioners from multiple countries. This could highlight differences in consumer perception regarding greenwashing in CSR communications based on location and factors related to different cultures. A cross-cultural approach could further validate the research findings in this paper (Golob et al., 2019). Overall, this study is beneficial in providing preliminary findings for the impact greenwashing skepticism can have on the success of CSR-related marketing campaigns, which is beneficial for marketing practitioners to keep in mind when communicating with consumers and other interested parties about the positive environmental efforts of the companies and organizations they represent.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

Diminishing natural resources, global warming, wildlife extinction, and inequality are all social and environmental issues we are faced with today. In recent years, due to these increasing concerns, citizens have become more aware of how their actions affect the health of our environment, and they are expecting that the companies they support take the precautions needed to protect ecosystems and consider the potential social, economic, and environmental impacts of their businesses (Ye et al., 2020). Many companies have responded to this expectation through engagement with CSR initiatives, which can provide a number of benefits for the planet, communities, and employees. While the demand for CSR has been increasing, so has the prevalence of greenwashing, which has caused consumers to be more skeptical about a company's motives when environmental efforts are promoted (Du et al., 2010). Because of this, marketing practitioners have an especially challenging job to balance the demand for corporate responsibility with the skepticism of greenwashing. Thus, there is a need for research that explores the process of developing CSR communications from a marketer's perspective, to gain a better understanding of how the risk of greenwashing is managed.

This study explored the implications that arise when greenwashing tactics are used by companies and how these implications affect the positive impact and potential value of CSR. It further investigated the experiences of marketing practitioners when developing CSR-related communications and responding to consumer perception. This was achieved through an exploratory survey of marketing practitioners in Canada to determine the factors that contribute to both positive and negative response to CSR communication, the methods employed to avoid the perception of greenwashing, and how transparency can be improved to establish trust with audiences. The results from the survey illustrate that practitioners believe CSR is a growing area of importance in marketing. They acknowledge that although there is a growing demand for CSR efforts from companies, they also believe consumers are more skeptical of communications that promote these efforts. To manage the risk of greenwashing, marketers aim to develop messages

that are not too self-promoting and clearly communicate a lack of personal benefit for a company, that showcase concrete action being taken by the company and evidence to support claims, that rely on positive marketing appeals such as pride and compassion, and that are tailored to the specific audience they are communicating to and based on the industry the company belongs to.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Survey Questions

1. What does CSR as a concept include for you? Please select all that apply.
   o Supporting the supply chain (e.g., purchasing fair trade products, providing fair worker wages)
   o Engaging in philanthropy work (e.g., cash donations, in-kind donations)
   o Helping the environment (e.g., reducing carbon footprint)
   o Benefiting society (e.g., promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion)
   o Supporting communities (e.g., local volunteerism)
   o Improving employee welfare (e.g., workplace meditation program)
   o Providing business transparency (e.g., sustainability reporting)
   o Other: _____

2. From your experience working on CSR campaigns, which of the following do your clients care about? Please select all that apply.
   o Supporting the supply chain (e.g., purchasing fair trade products, providing fair worker wages)
   o Engaging in philanthropy work (e.g., cash donations, in-kind donations)
   o Helping the environment (e.g., reducing carbon footprint)
   o Benefiting society (e.g., promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion)
   o Supporting communities (e.g., local volunteerism)
   o Improving employee welfare (e.g., workplace meditation program)
   o Providing business transparency (e.g., sustainability reporting)
   o Other: _____

3. Rate your opinion on the following statement: CSR has become an important topic of focus in marketing campaigns.
   o Strongly agree
   o Somewhat agree
   o Neither agree nor disagree
   o Somewhat disagree
   o Strongly disagree

4. Why did you choose your answer in question 3?
   (Comment box)

5. How has the marketing approach to CSR changed in the last 5 years?
   (Comment box)

6. Which of the following social media do you use to communicate with audiences about CSR? Please select all that apply.

Consumers
- o Facebook
- o Twitter
- o Instagram
- o TikTok
- o LinkedIn
- o YouTube
- o Other: _____

Investors
- o Facebook
- o Twitter
- o Instagram
- o TikTok
- o LinkedIn
- o YouTube
- o Other: _____

General Public
- o Facebook
- o Twitter
- o Instagram
- o TikTok
- o LinkedIn
- o YouTube
- o Other: _____

7. Which of the following traditional media do you use to communicate with audiences about CSR? Please select all that apply.

Consumers
- o Newspaper
- o Radio
- o Television
- o Print advertising
- o Digital advertising
- o Other: _____

Investors
- o Newspaper
- o Radio
- o Television
- o Print advertising
- o Digital advertising
- o Other: _____

General Public
- o Newspaper
- o Radio
- o Television
- o Print advertising
- o Digital advertising
- o Other: _____

8. Approximately how many times per week do you communicate with audiences about CSR?
   - o Less than once a week
   - o Once a week
   - o 1-3 times a week
   - o 3-5 times a week
   - o 6+ times a week

9. Which marketing appeals do you use to communicate about CSR? Please select all that apply.
   - o Empathy appeal
   - o Guilt appeal
   - o Pride appeal
   - o Fear appeal
   - o Anger appeal
   - o Shame appeal
   - o Compassion appeal
   - o Gratitude appeal
   - o Relief appeal
   - o Self-benefit appeal
   - o Other: _____

10. What are some of the benefits of working on CSR campaigns?
    (Comment box)

11. What are some of the challenges of working on CSR campaigns?
    (Comment box)

12. From your experience working on CSR campaigns, do you believe there is an increasing demand for companies to engage in environmental initiatives?
    - o Yes
    - o No

13. How do the following groups usually react to CSR campaigns?

Employees
- o Very positively
- o Somewhat positively

        o Neither positively or negatively
        o Somewhat negatively
        o Very negatively

Investors
        o Very positively
        o Somewhat positively
        o Neither positively or negatively
        o Somewhat negatively
        o Very negatively

Consumers
        o Very positively
        o Somewhat positively
        o Neither positively or negatively
        o Somewhat negatively
        o Very negatively

14. Can you provide an example of a reaction to a CSR campaign?
    (Comment box)

15. From your experience working on CSR campaigns, what factors contribute to positive public perception?
    (Comment box)

16. From your experience working on CSR campaigns, what factors contribute to negative public perception?
    (Comment box)

17. From your experience working on CSR campaigns, do you believe there is an increase in the scrutiny of environmental initiatives from the public?
    o Yes
    o No

18. Do you fear your work on a CSR campaign may be perceived as greenwashing?
    o Yes
    o No

19. *(For those that answered yes to the above question)* Does your fear of greenwashing accusations make you hesitant to communicate about CSR to consumers?
    o Yes
    o No

20. What safeguards do you put in place to avoid greenwashing when communicating to consumers about CSR?
    (Comment box)

21. How do you aim to build trust with consumers when communicating about CSR?
(Comment box)

22. How do you aim to build trust with stakeholders when communicating about CSR?
(Comment box)

23. Do your CSR marketing strategies change depending on the industry you are communicating about?
    o Yes
    o No

24. *(For those that answered yes to the above question)* How do your marketing strategies change and for which industries?
    (Comment box)

25. Do you notice differences in responses to CSR depending on the industry you are communicating about?
    (Comment box)

26. Which departments in your company work on CSR-related projects? Please select all that apply.
    o Finance/Accounting
    o Human Resources
    o Legal
    o Information Technology
    o Communication/Marketing

27. Which gender do you identify as?
    o Female
    o Male
    o Non-binary
    o Other: _____
    o Prefer not to answer

28. Which age range do you fall under?
    o 18-24
    o 25-39
    o 40-60
    o 61+

29. How many years have you been working in the marketing/communication field?
    o Less than 1 year
    o 1-3 years
    o 4-6 years
    o 7-9 years

o 10+ years

30. How many years have you been working on CSR campaigns?
   o Less than 1 year
   o 1-3 years
   o 4-6 years
   o 7-9 years
   o 10+ years

31. Do you work for a marketing agency or as a freelancer?
   o Marketing agency
   o Freelancer

Appendix B: Tables and Figures

Table 1 Three approaches to CSR communication (Van de Ven, 2008).

Approach	Description of approach
The reputation management approach	This approach focuses on the basic requirements of conducting a responsible business, in order to continue maintaining and operating the business. Companies who take this approach are responsible but not yet considered to be virtuous, and do not imply explicit CSR communication.
The building a virtuous corporate brand approach	This approach requires that a company makes an explicit promise to consumers and other interested parties to focus on and excel in their CSR endeavours. This approach will often be focused on the protection and improvement of the brand's image.
The ethical product differentiation approach	This approach requires differentiating a company's product or service, based on its social or environmental benefit, from those of competitors. Firms can showcase this approach by building a virtuous corporate brand reputation or an ethical product differentiation strategy.

Table 2 The benefits and challenges of working on CSR campaigns, as identified by survey respondents.

Benefits
Increases employee satisfaction.
I love CSR campaigns when they represent real change. CSR campaigns can drive organizational change (or at least the desire to leverage these qualities).
Understanding more the consequences of everyone's action at all levels.
Being exposed to different avenues of CSR as well as learning more about ESG.
So often, as advertisers, we work on brands that we may like, but find it difficult to believe in. Working in the CSR space helps assuage some of that.
Using business as a force for good.
Doing good by doing good.
It can improve sales with socially and environmentally conscious consumers. It can force an industry to start making improvements.
Because the point is to be authentic, you do not need to think of a call to action driver.
Never stop learning...you'll learn a great wealth of knowledge.
You can get organizations to do more CSR, sense of purpose and added contribution to the good of society/humanity/planet.
The ability to feel that the work you're doing is for good or will do good beyond driving sales.
Transparency builds honesty and relationships with a brand.
It's feels like you are doing something good for the community/the world/for others.
When the substance is good, it's very gratifying for staff.
Challenges
Employee engagement can fluctuate.

When you know the company isn't really doing what it says it's doing, CSR campaigns are...incredibly hard.
Not being too general or too detailed / stating real benefits and actions and not just wishes.
Lack of authenticity and the confusion between CAUSE and PURPOSE.
What you can and cannot say, treading the line between walking the walk and talking the talk.
Communicating complex topics. Setting goals.
Budget, client/charity expectations, working with volunteers, avoiding greenwashing, and many more.
Remaining humble.
Hard to find the impact year after year.
The messaging can be twisted, stretched or false.
Being authentic, trying not to embellish on what is actually being done.
Getting it past legal.
Finding the fine line between objectivity & subject ability.
Not core budgets, not core business so not core attention from SMT. There are more opportunities than appetite.
With the sheer number of efforts, messages and campaigns that are out there, standing out has become increasingly difficult.
Delivering the messages in a way that all audiences will understand.
Decrease in engagement, trying to get buy-in from stakeholders, it can be hard to find the right wording/imagery to go along with a CSR campaign AND match the brand/organization.
Concern of over-looking something and being accused of greenwashing. Lots of sensitivities and nuance to navigate.

Figure 1 Comparison between what CSR means to marketing practitioners and the areas of CSR that their clients care most about.

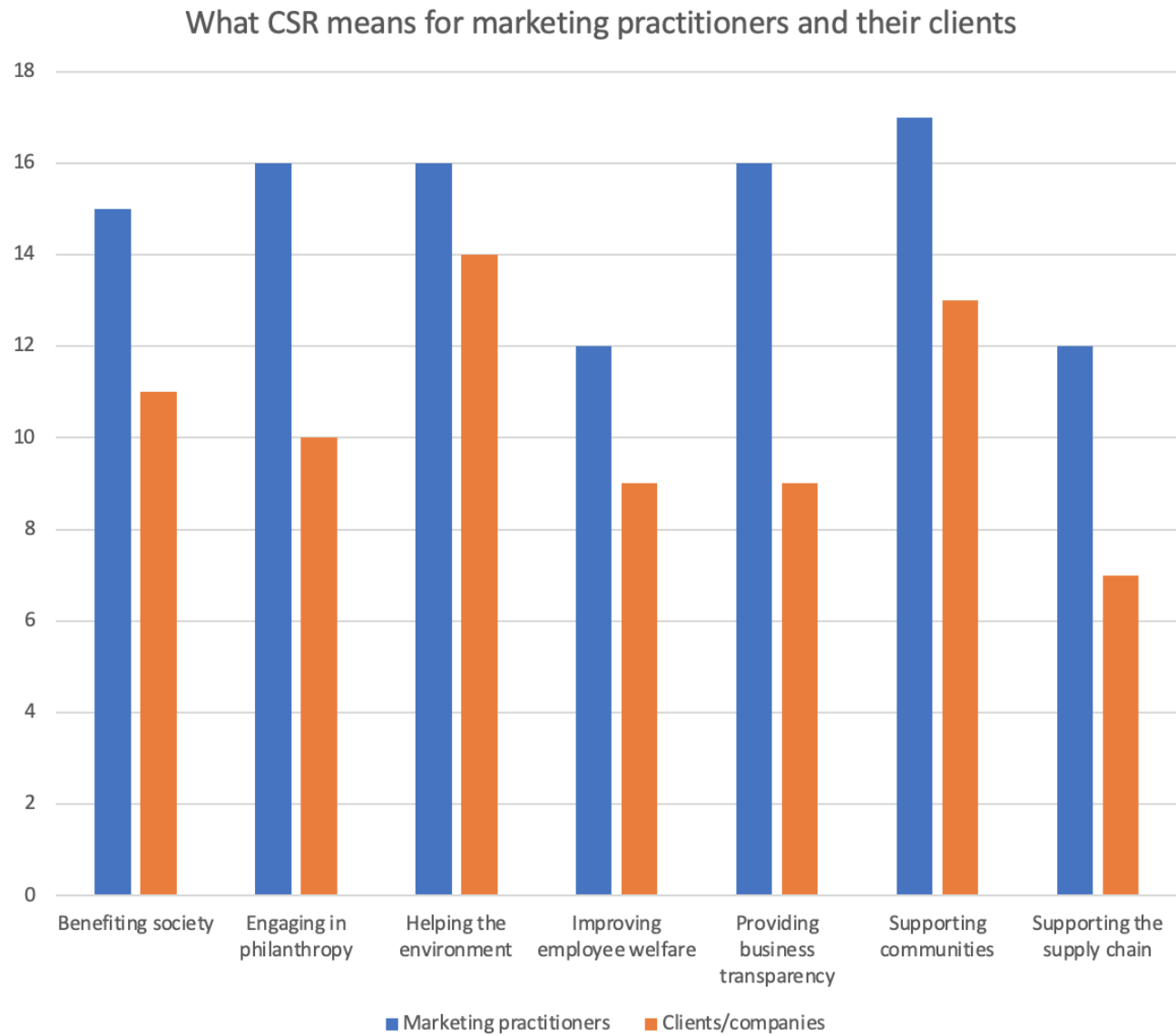What CSR means for marketing practitioners and their clients

Figure 2 Tension between demand for CSR and increase scrutiny of greenwashing based on survey respondents opinions.
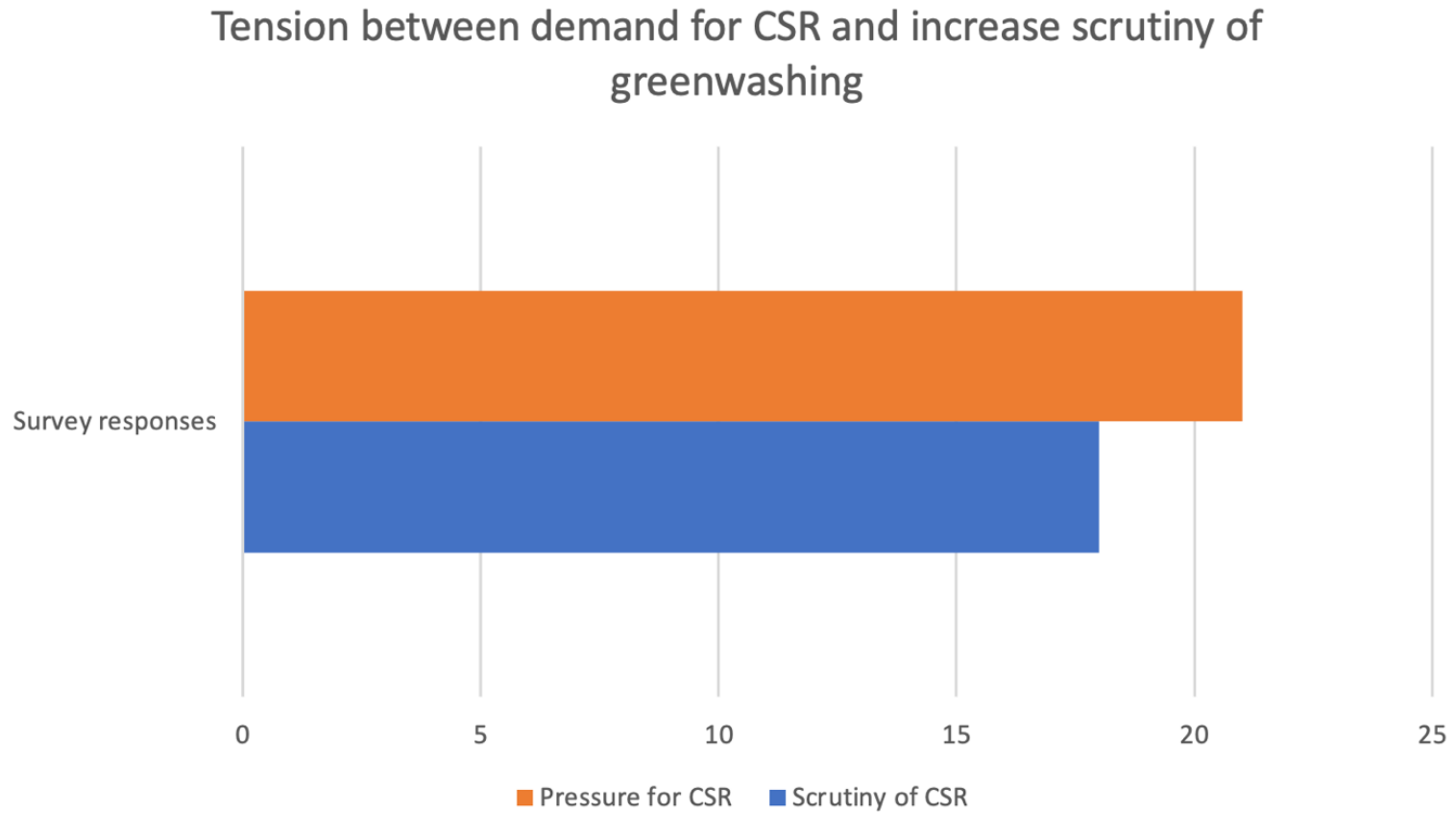
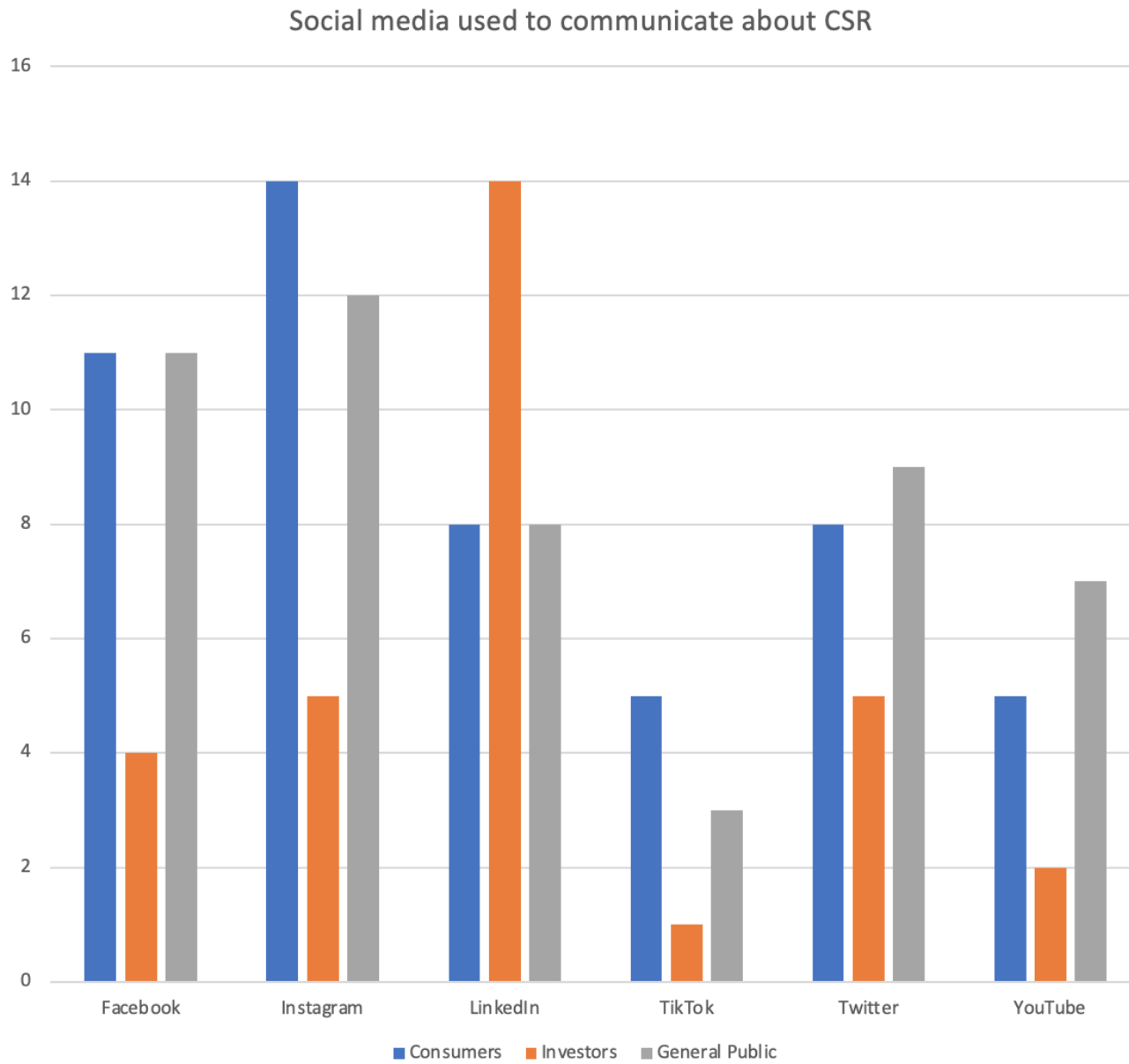**Figure 3** Social media platforms used to communicate to different audiences about CSR.

Social media used to communicate about CSR

Figure 4 Traditional media used to communicate to different audiences about CSR.
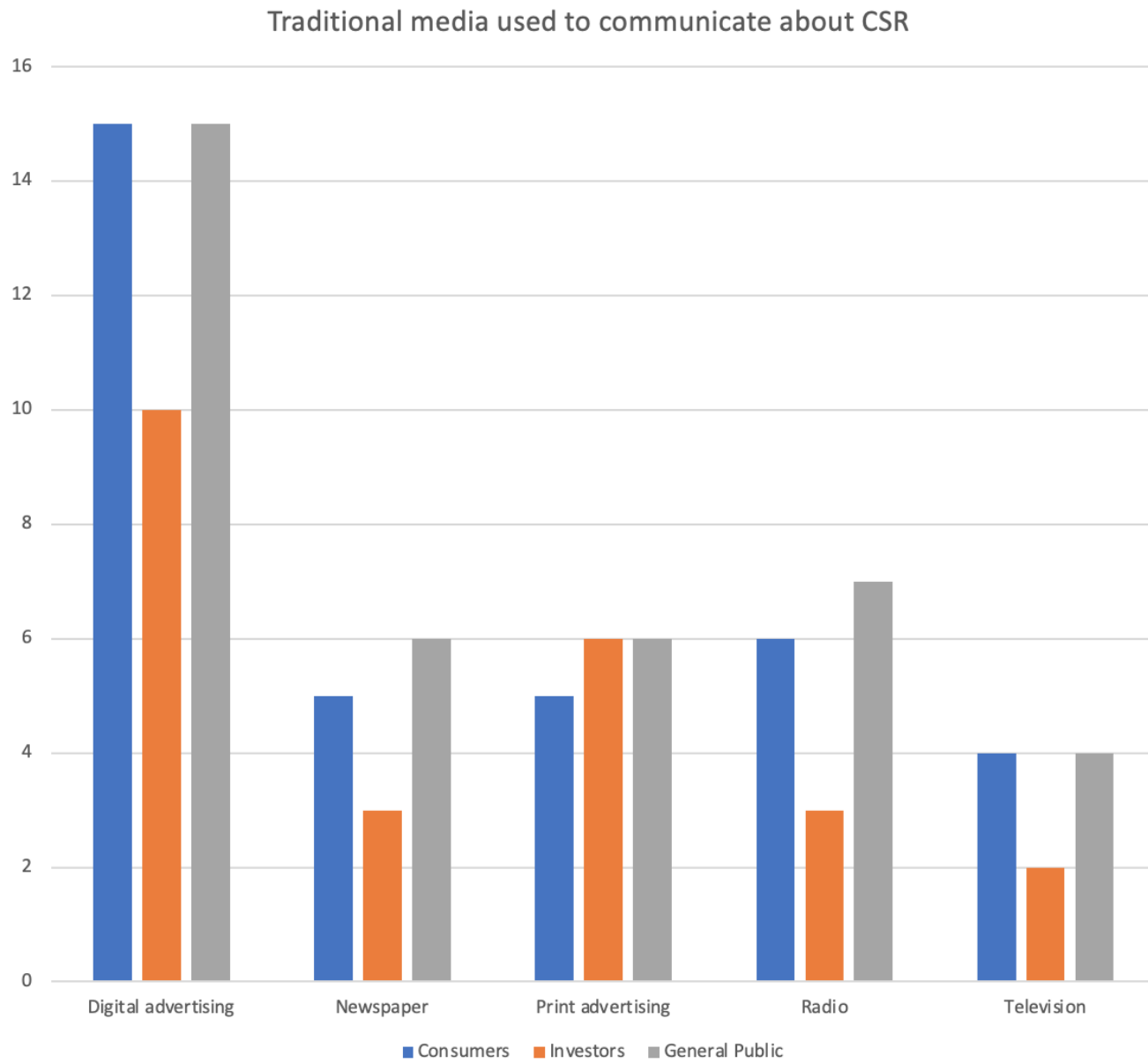

Traditional media used to communicate about CSR

Figure 5 The frequency of CSR communications.

Frequency of CSR communications