

FUNDAÇÃO GETULIO VARGAS
ESCOLA DE ADMINISTRAÇÃO DE EMPRESAS DE SÃO PAULO

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**THE INFLUENCE OF A COMPANY'S COMMUNICATED CSR INITIATIVE ON
PRIVATE CONSUMER BEHAVIOR**

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Thesis presented to Escola de
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requirement to obtain the title of Master in
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Competitividade em Empresas Globais

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to determine if and how the communication of a company's CSR initiative influences private consumer behavior. Hereby it is also considered whether the consumers' support of the issue at hand exerts influence on private behavior and evaluations of the company behind the CSR initiative. In order to answer the research questions, an online experiment was conducted that was aimed at assessing differences in reported sustainable behavior among participant groups, of which one was exposed to a CSR initiative by a company. The answers to the questionnaire show no significant changes in reported consumer behavior between participant groups. This shows that desirable and specific behavioral outcomes of CSR initiatives are difficult to predict and measure due to the multifaceted nature of CSR. Moreover, CSR seems to entail more advantages for the company rather than consumers or society as a whole. On this basis, the communication of a company's CSR initiative is recommended to reap known benefits but does not seem to evoke changes in private and unrelated consumer behavior.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, Consumer Behavior, Sustainability

Resumo

O objetivo desta pesquisa é determinar se e como a comunicação da iniciativa de RSE de uma empresa influencia o comportamento do consumidor privado. Considera-se também se o apoio dos consumidores ao tema em questão influencia o comportamento privado e as avaliações da empresa por trás da iniciativa de RSE. Para responder às questões da pesquisa, foi realizada uma pesquisa online com o objetivo de avaliar as diferenças no comportamento sustentável relatado entre os grupos participantes, dos quais um foi exposto a uma iniciativa de RSE de uma empresa. As respostas ao questionário não mostram mudanças significativas no comportamento do consumidor relatado entre os grupos de participantes. Isso mostra que os resultados comportamentais desejáveis e específicos das iniciativas de RSE são difíceis de prever e medir devido à natureza multifacetada da RSE. Além disso, a RSE parece trazer mais vantagens para a empresa do que para os consumidores ou para a sociedade como um todo. Nesta base, a comunicação de uma iniciativa de RSE de uma empresa é recomendada para colher benefícios conhecidos, mas não parece evocar mudanças no comportamento do consumidor privado e não relacionado.

Palavras Chaves: Responsabilidade Social Empresarial, Comportamento do Consumidor, Sustentabilidade

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List of Abbreviations

BSR	Brand Social Responsibility
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
IQR	Inter-Quartile-Range
WTP	Willingness to pay

1 Introduction

1.1 Problem Definition

In recent years, due to the pressure from consumer side and as means to set themselves apart from the competition by improving their own image, companies' engagement and spending in the field of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities has increased (Boccia & Sarnacchiaro, 2017). CSR is defined in multiple ways and does not have a strict definition but can be summarized under the activities a company undertakes and the status it has in connection with its obligations towards stakeholders as well as society. Although consumers claim that CSR is an important topic, research does not provide clear evidence that supports consumers' reported attitudes towards CSR. Consequently, it remains unclear how exactly CSR activities affect consumer behavior, especially the parts that are not directly related to the company, its products, or its cause. To this day, very little research has focused on this topic, however it is of importance for marketers and executives to understand the dynamics, relationships, and outcomes behind CSR effort and consumer behavior, since CSR is not only a cost factor but also a tool to create stakeholder value and influence the consumers' evaluation of a company's products and brands. The vast majority of research on companies' CSR activities has focused on their influence on consumer purchasing behavior and brand perception, hence behavior directly related to the products and brands. The dimension that this research will focus on is the influence of CSR initiatives on private consumer behavior. Although concrete effects have yet to be measured and linked to CSR initiatives, various research findings already hint at a possible relationship between a company's communicated CSR initiatives and private consumer behavior outcomes.

When considering consumer-specific outcomes of CSR, previous research has predominantly considered the external outcomes (e.g. purchase behavior, loyalty). Looking at private consumer behavior as an outcome of marketing activities is of managerial importance and relevance, considering the concept of shared value and the fact that marketing has been extended to societal obligations. Consequently, it should serve the purpose of not only benefitting the company but also creating educational value for the consumers by contributing to building more sustainable societies and lifestyles. Especially nowadays, with heightened environmental awareness and consideration towards the environment, the consumer should not be the only entity that is expected to bear the cost of this transformation towards becoming

more sustainable. This research would contribute to evaluate whether marketing is fulfilling its shared value purpose in reality or is only used as a managerial tool to enrich corporates.

1.1 Objective

Against this background, the aim of this research is to demonstrate to what extent the communication of a company's CSR initiative has an effect on private consumer behavior and thus contribute to the currently low level of research in this particular field. In addition, it should be taken into account how consumers' support of the CSR issue influences brand or company evaluations.

The objective of this research can be described with three main research questions:

- (1) Does the communication of CSR activities have an effect on private consumer behavior?
- (2) What role does the consumers' support of the CSR issue play concerning changes in private consumer behavior?
- (3) How does brand evaluation vary among participants who have and have not been exposed to the CSR initiative of the company?

These research questions were successively dealt with through in the course of this scientific work and answered both theoretically and empirically.

1.2 Method of Investigation

In order to introduce the reader to the topic and to create the necessary theoretical foundations, the first part of the work deals with essential definitions, theories and effects, which serve to further understand the work and build upon each other.

The second chapter presents the relevance of CSR activities. Here, definitions, advantages, and disadvantages are thematized. In the third chapter, a description of the role CSR holds in communication and branding, and the potential benefits it can have for the company, follows. Subsequently, the fourth chapter deals with the impact of CSR initiatives on consumers. Since

almost none of these theories, effects or fundamentals described in the literature are directly related to the effect of CSR on unrelated, private consumer behavior, the content is connected to the topic at the end of each theoretical chapter. Possible implications for CSR influence on private consumer behavior from the described theory are briefly mentioned and discussed. These considerations serve as links with the theory in the empirical part of this research.

Chapter 5 describes the hypotheses to be established and tested on the basis of the research questions and the research title, before the methodology of the investigation is presented in chapter 6. The selected research instrument is an instruction-based experiment on sustainable behavior of the participants in connection with a product picture and description, including or excluding a CSR initiative by the company. The experiment was selected with the aim of comparing between different participant groups how the exposure to the CSR initiative of the company in context of a purchasing decision could lead to changes in reported private behavior. The participants' evaluation of the CSR initiative and company behind it were also determined during the experiment and used to evaluate the results and answer the research questions as well as to verify or refute the hypotheses.

Following the presentation of the results in Chapter 7, they are discussed and explained in Chapter 8 and classified according to the state of research. A final conclusion with resulting implications for the communication of CSR initiatives and their influence on private consumer behavior summarizes the results of the work.

2 Relevance of CSR

2.1 Definition and Examples

CSR activities mainly encompass voluntary and specific company investments (Barnett, 2007) to incorporate and allow for social and environmental issues that the company feels should be addressed in their operations as a business as well as their communication and interaction with relevant stakeholders (Mickels, 2009). Common CSR concerns tackled by companies are related to social issues and injustices, legal and regulatory affairs, consumer rights and protection, corporate governance, and sustainability (Ferrell, Harrison, Ferrell & Hair, 2019). In a practical environment however, the CSR activities companies undertake span across a wide range of initiatives (Peloza & Shang, 2010). This mainly stems from the fact that CSR does not have a strict definition in literature or business practice and the desire of companies to capture attention by undertaking innovative and distinctive action to highlight their cause. However, the term CSR can be summarized as a company's managerial commitment to focus on protecting and maximizing societal and economic welfare by focusing on principles and values which fulfil the company's perceived responsibilities towards their own business, stakeholders and society (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Carroll, 1999; Davis & Blomstrom, 1975; Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2011, p.1528).

Translating the topic of CSR into a company's interaction with its consumers, research shows that consumers value companies who behave environmentally and socially responsible, and at the same time expect more companies to engage in responsible behavior, which is why consumers have already become increasingly responsible in their consumption habits (Webb, Mohr, & Harris, 2008, p. 97). This changing consumer mindset stems from environmental and economic crises, such as the Diesel scandal (Ewing, 2015) and world financial crisis, with a great majority of Americans demanding social responsibility from companies and 75% of consumers stating CSR as an issue that remains of importance to them (Penn Schoen Berland, 2010; Webb et al., 2008). Consequently, it is no surprise it has been found that as much as 60% of a consumer's willingness to work for, recommend, invest in, and buy from a company seem to be dependent on the company's CSR reputation (Reputation Institute, 2013). Knowing of the increasing popularity to consume more responsibly, it also becomes interesting for companies and researchers alike to study CSR and develop theories and models in order to expand common knowledge in this field (Webb et al., 2008, p. 97). Accordingly, sustainability

has been declared an important global goal by the United Nations, demanding better consumer education including CSR initiatives on the topic (Hiller Connell & Kozar, 2012).

A conflicting outcome, especially of CSR initiatives tackling sustainability, is the negative association that can arise in consumers' minds. Sustainable products may be seen as more gentle or "weaker" when compared with conventional products, especially if the desired attribute is strength or durability. Consumers may hence have lower desire to buy sustainable products. On the other hand, companies with high-priced products or services may be perceived as more sustainable or "greener" than competitors who have a lower price point (Wang et al., 2017; Luchs, Naylor, Irwin & Raghunathan, 2010).

From the broad definition of CSR and corresponding company initiatives, it can already be seen that there is still an unsatisfied need for deeper understanding. The following chapters will review, assess, and analyze current literature knowledge on the topic, as well as the role of changing consumption, to arrive at a heightened understanding of how consumers react to CSR initiatives and which influence these initiatives have on their daily lives and actions.

2.2 CSR versus Ethics

The terms "CSR" and "Ethics" are not distinguishable by definition for the consumer but are closely linked in research. The link between the two terms and marketing has become evident and received attention of researchers in the past. However, there is still a need to explore the relationship of CSR, business ethics, branding and organizational behavior (Boccia & Sarnacchiaro, 2017, p. 153; Brunk, 2012; Ferrell et al., 2019). Commonly, Ethics are defined as the general "doing good" of companies and therefore closely linked with CSR activities (Schwartz & Carroll, 2007). It is argued that CSR relates more closely to the company's stakeholders, while Ethics are associated with internal organizational decision making. However, both types of actions may impact internal and external stakeholders equally, which is why CSR and Ethics are defined as interrelated in research and will be treated as such in this research as well (Brunk, 2012). This stems from the fact that both types of decisions and actions affect consumers' attitudes positively or negatively (Hsiao, Shen & Chao, 2015). For example, consumers may be willing to pay a premium for ethically produced goods, but at the same time may demand lower prices for goods they believe to be unethical (Trudel & Cotte, 2009). Due

to the close relationship between the two terms, and frequent overlapping usage in literature, this research does not delve further into broad demarcation and focuses on the use of the CSR term as a comprehensive description for responsible, sustainable, and ethical corporate behavior.

2.3 Advantages and Disadvantages

It has become indispensable for companies to engage in responsible behaviors and be seen doing so, especially since nowadays as much as 84% of global consumers are seeking sustainable and responsible products for consumption (Negrao, Mantovani & Andrade, 2018). Entering this new day and age in which CSR has become more important than ever, companies are now facing the need to adapt and react to changing consumer demands and act more responsibly in order to become and remain successful (Wang & Anderson, 2011, p.63). After all, it should be in a company's best interest to be perceived as a sustainable, socially and environmentally responsible company, which in return helps the company build a consumer relationship fostering purchase intentions and positive brand attitudes (Nyilasy, Gangadharbatla & Paladino, 2013). Therefore, CSR should not be seen as a cost factor or constraint that needs to be fulfilled in order to fit in, but rather as an investment in marketing to develop and shape companies in order to create value for the business and its stakeholders (Boccia & Sarnacchiaro, 2017). To evaluate results of this investments, companies should move from only evaluating purchasing behavior towards the its brands as an outcome of CSR to other consumer behaviors that may be linked with the exposure to CSR activities and initiatives (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004). Consequently, the marketing function requires a deeper understanding of the factors that moderate the effects of CSR activities and initiatives on consumers. With this knowledge, they would be able to precisely focus and direct their CSR efforts in a way that can ensure and maximize the desired effect on consumers (Pava & Krausz, 1996).

What sounds easy in theory encounters an obstacle in practice, since the concept of CSR can neither be clearly defined, nor can it be realized in a definitive way. Consequently, the umbrella of responsible corporate behavior encompasses a lot of different things and activities, in different places, at different times, with different people, who are coincidentally all affected in a different way by this behavior (J. L. Campbell, 2007; Peloza & Shang, 2010). Marketers will

therefore need to be cautious how they use the concept of CSR in order to consider the consumer's personal opinion on the issues, as well as their general impressions on whether and how companies utilize CSR initiatives to influence consumers' brand and product evaluations (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). Research indicates that consumer responses to CSR activities are affected by their beliefs about trade-offs the company is making between CSR and its traditional operations (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Webb et al., 2008). The extent of consumer skepticism towards a company is often related to the nature of the CSR initiative, hence whether the proclaimed action fits the company's goal. The time period and execution of the activities also play an important role in consumer perception and evaluation (Boccia & Sarnacchiaro, 2017). Due to the multifaceted nature of CSR initiatives, consumers may also end up evaluating one initiative as positive, while another causes negative associations in the consumers' minds (Aguilera, Rupp, Williams & Ganapathi, 2007). Additionally, CSR will not be the only factor influencing a consumer's attitude and decisions. Marketers also need to carefully consider the importance consumers attribute to certain aspects such as reputation, price, product features and brand names. It becomes especially interesting to assess how the consumer is making trade-offs between those aspects when making a purchasing decision (Burke, Dowling & Wei, 2018, p.1232).

The identified intricacies of both CSR initiatives and consumers' beliefs and evaluations may cause skepticism towards or misinterpretation of CSR initiatives on the consumer side (Peattie & Crane, 2005). For example, consumers might become skeptical of whether the initiative undertaken by the company is truly designed to benefit the identified cause, or whether it is a way to increase profits, attention, or both (Krishna & Rajan, 2009; Wang et al., 2017, p. 479). This is complicated by the fact that measures which work for one identified consumer segment, do not necessarily work for another (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004). Another problem identified in the literature is the phenomenon that projects, which are supported by big corporations and brand names as donors, do not seem to raise a significant number of funds due to the fact that individual donors feel like their donation will not make as much of an impact compared to the big, corporate donors (Bennett, Kim & Loken, 2013). Finally, some researchers even argue that CSR activities are in fact irresponsible spending of shareholders' funds for causes they may not approve of or have never intended to give their money to (Atkin, 2006).

On the other hand, it has been demonstrated that CSR programs focusing on the environment, for example energy conservation in hotels, can increase customers' conservation efforts while

simultaneously increasing liking for the company and decreasing costs (Wang et al., 2017). CSR initiatives can therefore contribute as a competitive advantage for businesses, not only through reducing costs but also by positively affecting marketing outcomes in a tangible and intangible manner (Negrão et al., 2018). Especially reputation of the company and its products can be affected, and a positive reputation serves as an intangible asset to the company that is hard to imitate, substitute or acquire for competitors within a short timeframe (Rindova & Martins, 2012). This again results in opportunities to gain a competitive advantage in the market. In addition to primary outcomes for the company implementing CSR initiatives, it is believed that these actions can also influence “secondary outcomes” (Romani & Grappi, 2014) on the consumer side. To this day, there exists little research that has identified or shown a relationship between consumers’ responsible consumption and variables related to companies’ CSR initiatives (Webb et al., 2008). This research will focus on closing the gap by finding more links between CSR initiatives a consumer is exposed to and the consumers private responsible behavioral patterns.

3 CSR in Communications and Branding

3.1 Potential Benefits

In order for companies to benefit from their CSR initiatives and avoid negative consequences, it is vital that the company itself communicates in an effective manner (Mohr, Webb & Harris, 2001; Morsing & Schultz, 2006; Nan & Heo, 2007; Parguel, Benoît-Moreau, & Larceneux, 2011). Communicating too heavily about CSR initiatives may lead consumers to believe that the company's motives are not honest but instead profit-oriented, which again causes consumers to question the advertised cause and company itself. This phenomenon is known as the self-promoters paradox, which also states that consumers perceive external sources to be more credible than internal sources because it does not create as much bias (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990; Dawkins, 2005). In the case of CSR this means that consumers who are exposed to a CSR claim made by the company itself could, without having further external information on the topic, believe the company is only communicating CSR initiatives for extrinsic motives, for example because it is a current trend in the market (Parguel et al., 2011).

Looking at the positive and negative consequences of CSR communication, it becomes clear that communicating CSR initiatives is to some extent an effort to build a relationship with stakeholders (Clarkson, 1995). This effort is complicated by the fact that consumer reactions are not as clear and accessible as market polls are leading companies to believe, which makes it difficult for companies to rely on the available information in order to evaluate, derive, and implement effective actions and strategies for CSR communication in the future (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004, p.10).

If the communication by the company is done right, brand attitudes will likely be affected positively by the consumers' assessment of the communication, since most consumers react positively to socially and environmentally responsible companies (Dickinson & Barker, 2007; Gammoh, Voss & Chakraborty, 2006; Nan & Heo, 2007). This can have personal reasons for the consumers such as the feeling to reduce guilt by purchasing and consuming sustainably, obtaining recognition from their peers, or alleviating the needs of others by supporting a good cause (Penner, Dovidio, Piliavin & Schroeder, 2005; Snyder & Clary, 1991). By building on these marketing and consumer interactions, the company can benefit from CSR initiatives as a way to strengthen consumer relationships, which cannot be easily imitated by competitors. This

becomes especially important nowadays, where products are less differentiated, and companies usually face a high number of competitors in the market. In order to assess the full effect of CSR communications, it is important for companies to not only focus on external outcomes like consumer loyalty and purchases, but also on internal outcomes such as attitudes, awareness and opinions on why the company is engaging in CSR. The impact of CSR communication on the internal outcomes is greater and can be measured in a better way than it can be done for the external outcomes (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004, p.12). This is due to the fact that a change in consumer buying behavior cannot be clearly attributed to the CSR action, since many components are factored in order to make such decisions and are therefore not specifically dependent on CSR communication on the company's side.

Due to the nature of the modern consumer, who carefully considers how his purchases affect the environmental, social, and ethical situation, the role of CSR in purchasing decisions can be studied by looking at responsible, ethical, and critical purchasing of products. The most important aspect in the study is consumer knowledge, hence awareness at the time of purchase (Boccia & Sarnacchiaro, 2017). The Knowledge, Attitude, and Behavior (KAB) model used in health education is a theoretical model which argues that knowledge and awareness provoke behavioral changes (Bettinghaus, 1986). For the thematic of CSR this means that the more consumers know about and are aware of a company's CSR initiatives, the more their behavior towards the company will be influenced.

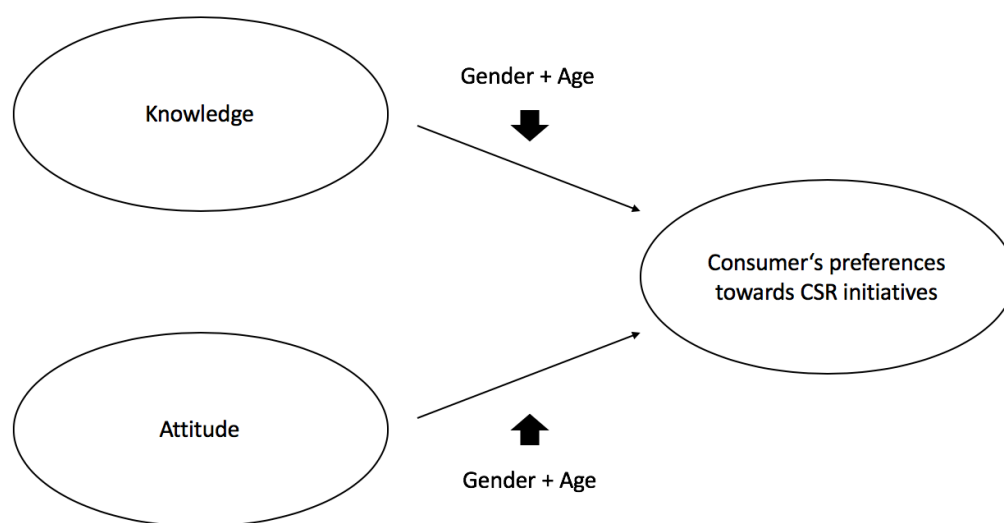


Figure 1. Explanation of the KAB model related to CSR initiatives adapted from Boccia & Sarnacchiaro 2017, p. 153

Accordingly, most scholars claim that the reputation of a company affects consumers in their product evaluations and choices. Recent work by Burke, Dowling and Wei (2018) suggests that consumers are in fact influenced in their choices by company reputation when buying products that are clearly branded with the company's name. In doing so, consumers distinguish between companies that proactively take a stance with their CSR initiatives and companies who use CSR as an opportunity to keep up with the competition (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004, p. 15). Consumers are more likely to behave environmentally friendly if the company is setting an example with its behavior, but explicit request from the company's side, especially if it is selling at a high price point, may backfire and cause resentment among consumers, because such requests involve an additional, direct cost that is carried by the consumer. In case of absence of environmental efforts on the company's side, for example, consumers tend to react on the basis of their own perceptions of the company's greenness and their own intentions to behave in an environmentally friendly way (Wang et al., 2017).

An observed side effect of CSR initiatives is the self-oriented value they offer to consumers who do not display personal interest in the issues addressed by the company through the initiative. This especially stands out for environmental initiatives that are coupled with a monetary benefit, since saving money represents a strong, utilitarian motive for consumers (C. T. Allen, 1982). It can therefore be advisable for companies to structure their messages in a way that appeals to the different pre-existing attitudes their consumers may or may not show towards the products, brands or company (Wang & Anderson, 2011, p. 65). CSR initiatives automatically generate more awareness when they are product-related, since consumers inevitably evaluate product attributes in order to form a basis for further decisions (Peloza & Shang, 2010, p.129). The bottom line to take away from the benefits of CSR initiatives to companies and branding is that companies should also consider the secondary outcomes of CSR, such as consumer conservation behavior, to increase the social impact of their investment (Negrão et al., 2018).

3.2 Brand Social Responsibility

In the context of CSR used in branding, the term "Brand Social Responsibility" (BSR) has surfaced within recent years. BSR can be defined as "consumers' perceptions of the extent to which a brand reflects the human values related to social responsibility" (Grohmann & Bodur,

2014). Researchers claim there is a need to differ between corporate branding (CSR) and product branding because of the difference in strategic focus of the two (Burke et al., 2018, p. 1230). For example, if a brand's positioning clearly involves its CSR engagement, consumers' awareness of this particular brand increases, as opposed to a brand that engages in CSR activities but does not necessarily brand itself accordingly (Peloza & Shang, 2010). BSR is a mixture of the consumers' perceptions of social responsibility associated with the brand's products and the corresponding social responsibility connected with marketing activities undertaken by the brand (Brunk, 2010; Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2007; Henderson & Arora, 2010; Keller, 1993).

From this observation it can be drawn that CSR activities at the product and brand level are a relevant topic for research because consumer perception and awareness seem to vary considerably when comparing company level social responsibility to product brand level social responsibility. Additionally, some consumers may not even associate a specific product or brand with the company that stands behind it (Grohmann & Bodur, 2014, pp. 375-376). Also, because of this common issue, consumers' perceptions of social responsibility form at the product brand level (Grohmann & Bodur, 2014) and may therefore vary between different brands from the same company. This again generates difficulties to create a brand with certain responsibility associations as means of differentiation from competition (Keller & Lehmann, 2006), if the degree of social responsibility varies across a company's different brands.

The key differences between CSR and BSR consequently concern three main aspects:

- BSR's primary stakeholders are the consumers
- CSR perceptions do not necessarily transfer to the product brand level
- BSR perceptions depend on holistic perceptions

It can be concluded and kept in mind for the evaluation of this research later on, that perceptions of social responsibility on the product brand level are different from CSR perceptions in general. At the same time, the perceptions of social responsibility are the strongest drivers for consumers' responses to product brands, not the company in general (Grohmann & Bodur, 2014).

4 CSR Impact on Consumers

4.1 Determinants of Consumer Reactions

The aim of this research is to contribute to CSR literature and theories by investigating positive effects a company's CSR initiative could have on secondary outcomes, such as private consumer behavior. In order to assess a possible influence, the following paragraphs contain a review of existing literature on the factors that determine if and how consumers react to CSR initiatives they are exposed to.

Evaluating the influence of CSR initiatives on consumer responses is a complicated topic that to this day has not been extensively studied. It remains unclear which characteristics of consumers influence the perception of CSR, but some underlying psychological processes have been studied and may offer answers as to what drives or amplifies consumer responses. However, it remains important to further study psychological processes related to this question and to also consider emotional processes related to CSR initiatives of companies and organizations (Bhattacharya, Korschun, & Sen, 2008; Castro-González, Bande, Fernández-Ferrín, & Kimura, 2019).

4.1.1 Relationship with Brands and Companies

As has been established in earlier chapters, consumer behavior, attitudes, and perception are partly dependent on the CSR actions taken by the company (Wang et al., 2017). Consequently, CSR can play a crucial role in provoking positive brand attitudes (Ferrell et al., 2019).

For consumers, brands have a symbolic value. The help in building, defining, and promoting self-identity and can be regarded as parts of the psychological self. Consumers consider and include a few brands they feel especially close to in this psychological self. Those brands' CSR actions are then often experienced by the consumers as representative of their own morals and actions and consequently are very likely to impact consumers' future moral behaviors (Escalas, 2004; Reimann & Aron, 2009; Trump & Brucks, 2012). Consistent with these findings, Dahlén and Lange (2005) found out that consumers tend to support familiar brands and their positive communication statements, rather than unfamiliar brands. Therefore, it can be stated that the actual impact a company's CSR initiatives have on a consumer's prosocial behavior depends

on the social distance between the consumer and the brand, hence how close consumers feel connected with the brand (Negrão et al., 2018).

The academic term that is used widely in literature for this phenomenon is the so-called *self-brand overlap*. An individual consumer's need for self-identification and validation of one's social identity causes consumers to emotionally attach themselves to selected brands of companies they identify or "overlap" with to a certain extent (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000). This identification is motivated by consumers' need to maintain a positive self-image (Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994). By identifying with socially and environmentally responsible behavior of companies and brands, the consumer's social identity is defined through the companies' meaningful and positive actions which become part of the consumer's sense of self. Consequently, consumer behavior may be affected by the CSR actions and efforts by companies, dependent on the degree of self-brand overlap between consumer and company. In accordance with this claim, it has been found that not only positive but also negative CSR behavior of companies can affect moral consumer behavior. In an experiment by Newman and Brucks (2018), participants with higher self-brand overlap were less generous with their donations after being exposed to a brand's positive CSR actions. Consumers with a lower self-brand overlap should not be affected in their moral behaviors after being exposed to either positive or negative CSR actions. Within the same experiment it has also been found that consumers with a higher (vs. lower) self-brand overlap were more (less) generous after being exposed to negative CSR behavior, because they were experiencing higher levels of guilt caused by the company's actions. The consumers' guilt when exposed to negative moral behavior causes a balancing response in consumers with high self-brand overlap, which causes them to increase their own moral behaviors.

If a company actively engages in and promotes CSR, these actions can increase the sense of identification between the consumer's sense of self and the character of the company (Lichtenstein, Drumwright, & Braig, 2004; Newman & Brucks, 2018; Zhong & Liljenquist, 2006). Higher identification in turn contributes to the customer's self-esteem and general sense of well-being if the company engages in positive CSR behavior, because it encourages the consumer to contribute and engage in positive behaviors themselves (Tajfel & Turner, 1985; Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004). If managers and companies want society to benefit from these findings, it is advisable for them to work on making consumers feel close and connected to the brand (Negrão et al., 2018). Leveraging the positive feelings and preferences for a company's

products that come with CSR engagement, consumers will also perceive the company as exceptionally ethical, exceeding their expectations (Creyer & Ross, 1997).

While the findings described in this chapter clearly display a trend in consumer reactions to CSR initiatives, little, if any, research considers how relationships between the consumer self and the company impact consumer behavior that is not directly related to the company conducting the CSR initiatives, its brands, or its products. Working on closing this gap, this research is trying to investigate beyond the purchasing behavior and consumer attitudes in order to determine the full impact of CSR initiatives on the consumer side.

4.1.2 Behavioral Concepts and Attitudes

The previous chapter has established that companies and brands with greater social influence, perceived expertise, and consumer identification with the brand exert a more significant social influence on its consumers (Lichtenstein et al., 2004). But actual consumer behavior is not only the influence of companies' and brands' actions paired with social identity and self. Consumer behavior starts with conscious intentions set by the consumer himself. These intentions are largely affected by attitudes which are present when processing information and making decisions (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

Attitudes are formed by consumers through the evaluation and resulting perception of their own past behavior (Bem, 1967). While it is a commonly observed phenomenon that humans prefer doing what everybody else is doing over doing "the right thing", which in this case would be acting environmentally and socially responsible, it has been found that cueing certain behaviors as "good" or "responsible" may produce desired effects in consumer behavior by leveraging this phenomenon (Cialdini, Reno & Kallgren, 1990). For example, if certain behaviors are cued as "environmentally friendly" by a company in their CSR initiatives, consumers may perceive themselves as an environmentally-friendly person, regardless of whether they adopted the behavior because of the initiative, or if they had already behaved this way in the past (Grice, 1975; Schwarz, 1994). The simple cue that was added through the initiative evokes this change in perception by the consumer. Hence, positive cueing causes consumers to develop more positive attitudes towards environmentally friendly behavior and makes them see themselves as more environmentally friendly while increasing their obligation

towards the environment (Cornelissen et al., 2008). Since environmental attitude is defined as “a cognitive and affective judgment of the value of environmental protection” (Lee, 2009), it is no surprise that these inherent values, paired with positive cues set by companies’ CSR initiatives, can influence consumer purchase decisions. Attitudes in general evolve from certain beliefs a consumer holds about the respective object or initiative in question, in this case the CSR issue that is tackled by the company (Azjen, 1980).

In reality, a wide gap between consumer attitudes and actual behavior can be observed (Auger & Devinney, 2007; Carrington, Neville & Whitwell, 2010). This is the case because behavioral intention does not only depend on attitudes a consumer has, but on subjective norms as well. These norms can be described as the social pressure consumers feel towards performing a particular, desired behavior. Especially ethical obligations and concerns represent important influences on consumer behavior and attitudes, which are regulated by a sense of moral obligation towards ethical issues addressed by society (Shaw, Hogg, Wilson, Shiu & Hassan, 2006). Still, different levels of consumer knowledge concerning CSR activities lead to different levels of responsibility in consumer behavior (Mohr et al., 2001). Although it can be drawn on a lot of theory concerning knowledge, attitudes, and behavior, especially the younger consumer sector is driven by the desire to learn independently and make their own experiences with certain products, brands, and companies (Hwang, Lee, & Diddi, 2015, p.98).

A major factor when evaluating consumer behavior is the social influence of peers, as has been touched on in the previous paragraph. The so-called *social proof* concept states that individuals tend to look at the behavior of their peers in order to determine their own course of action, especially in situations that are uncertain or in which ambiguous social influence plays a bigger role (Allen, 1965; Baron, Vandello & Brunsman, 1996; Cialdini, 1993; Goldstein, Cialdini & Griskevicius, 2008; Schultz, Nolan, Cialdini, Goldstein & Griskevicius, 2007; Tesser, Campbell & Mickler, 1983). This could lead companies to believe that once they contribute to a CSR cause, consumers may feel the social pressure to contribute as well. In practice, however, the phenomenon of *social loafing* has been found related to the CSR topic as well as regular work on teams within companies. Social loafing describes the circumstance under which individual team members feel less inclined to contribute to a team effort, than when working towards the same goal independently, because they most likely do not feel valued enough when working collectively. Accordingly, individuals who feel valued and regard their own actions and contributions as important in achieving the goal are less likely to free-ride on others’

contributions and efforts (Bennett et al., 2013; Latané, Williams & Harkins, 1979). It is also possible and logical that pride in consumers plays a role in engaging in socially responsible behaviors among consumers (Khan & Dhar, 2006; Kouchaki, 2011). In research conducted where consumers indicated their willingness to pay (WTP) for a CSR friendly product, participants tended to be overly optimistic in providing their WTP in order to promote their image (Yadav, van Rensburg & Kelley, 2012). Generally, WTP is influenced by personal consumer characteristics, such as human values (Lerro, Caracciolo, Vecchio & Cembalo, 2018, p. 703). Another finding was that consumers tend to resist activities that entail a direct cost on their individual self and react significantly more when confronted with a CSR initiative where the company is also perceived to put in green efforts. The fact that the company is also engaging triggers consumers to feel obligated to contribute to the cause (Morales, 2005; White & Simpson, 2013, p. 78).

The main trade-off consumers are making is between personal gains from negative moral behaviors versus retaining their positive self-concept. Generally, individuals have an internal standard of moral behavior and avoid such behaviors that deviate too far from this standard. Therefore, individuals engage in mental accounting of their future moral behaviors balanced against their past behaviors or the perceptions of those behaviors. This means they are steering future behaviors towards originally observed behaviors by incorporating observed behavioral attributes into their own self-concept. The resulting dissonance from acting inconsistently and against the moral standards of oneself motivates consumers to incorporate and act on observed CSR behavior. This should eliminate the moral licensing effect, where individuals guiltlessly act morally irresponsible because they have done something morally responsible before (Campbell, 1964; Goldstein & Cialdini, 2007; Jordan, Mullen & Murnighan, 2011; Mazar, Amir & Ariely, 2008). However, research has found conflicting evidence in moral consumer behavior after being exposed to CSR initiatives. In research conducted by Gino and Galinsky (2012), individuals acted increasingly unethical after being exposed to ethical actions of others, but at the same time also acted more unethical after observing unethical actions of others. Regardless of the conflicting research findings it was established that CSR initiatives by companies generate awareness in consumers regarding their past moral behavior as well as a frame of reference for goal oriented moral behavior that consumers can follow with their own actions (Newman & Brucks, 2018).

To summarize, it can be said that a number of moral principles and standards may guide consumer behavior, but so far there is little understanding in literature and research as to how those morals interrelate with the influence CSR initiatives of companies have on private consumer behavior (Castro-González et al., 2019).

4.2 Dimensions of Consumer Reactions

As can be concluded from the previous chapters, researchers documented CSR influence on certain cognitive aspects which influence consumer behavior (Kim, 2015). However, only a limited number of studies were able to demonstrate how CSR initiatives can influence the prosocial and responsible consumer behavior that goes beyond the consumer-brand relationship and affects the consumer's personal lifestyle and habits (Negrão et al., 2018, p.140).

4.2.1 Related to Product and Brand

It is apparent that the positive nature of CSR initiatives causes consumers to perceive the executing company in a positive way (Castro-González et al., 2019). As a consequence, this positive perception can influence consumers' WTP positively (Lerro et al., 2018, p.703). These attitudes and responses become even more positive when consumers perceive the company to be a pioneer with its CSR activities (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004). If the company pairs these activities with positive cueing of certain environmentally responsible behaviors, consumers could respond with a positive environmental behavior, as well as a preference for more expensive, but environmentally friendly products. This has been found in a research by Cornelissen, Pandelaere, Warlop and Dewitte (2008), where participants could choose between different products in a simulated shop environment, after being exposed to environmental behaviors that had been cued as positive. Transferring the findings to CSR initiatives points companies towards achieving heightened product preference in consumers when cueing their own advertised CSR behaviors as environmentally positive behavior, with a positive side effect beyond the company-consumer dynamic by increasing environmentally conscious behavior on the consumer side.

Although a positive consumer attitude towards the product, brand, or company is a desirable outcome of CSR initiatives, it does not mean it will lead to changes in consumer behavior. Consumers may have developed positive attitudes but might not be able or willing to act on them in terms of financial support for the CSR cause or product purchases. This can also be a question of resources available to the individual consumer (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004). Media coverage also plays into some consumers developing cynical attitudes towards companies who promote their CSR initiatives. Especially with scandals and the media criticizing environmental and social efforts as ways to make money for the company, consumers have grown a certain skepticism towards CSR in general (Krishna & Rajan, 2009). They are also more likely to make an effort to avoid negative company behavior, than to reward companies that act responsibly. As one participant in the research conducted by Bhattacharya and Sen (2004) put it: “I am more likely to avoid a company that truly annoys me [...] than I am to go out of my way to buy from a company that is doing public good.”.

4.2.2 Related to CSR Cause

When looking at consumer behavior that is directly related to the CSR issue tackled by the company, one has to bear in mind that the resulting effects will vary according to the cause that is supported. The price point of the company as well as the consumer's and company's motivation also play a key role in how the behavior of consumers will be affected by the CSR initiative (Ellen, Mohr & Webb, 2000). A research conducted by Cornelissen et al. (2008) found, that those consumers who were actively cued with environmental behaviors were, as a result, also actively looking for ways to adjust their behavior accordingly to minimize their own environmental impact. It was also found that higher spending for social causes was associated with higher levels of happiness in consumers (Dunn, Aknin, & Norton, 2008).

However, not every company's CSR support weighs equally in consumer evaluations and not every initiative can influence consumer behavior. Research suggests a couple of factors that may moderate the effect CSR has on consumers. For example, the company's perception that is formed in the consumer's mind clearly influences their behavior. If a company is perceived as “green” by consumers, they are more likely to engage in environmentally friendly behavior, a study by (Wang et al., 2017) found. Interestingly, consumer reactions are also more consistently related to a cause that is supported by a company. A research conducted by

Bhattacharya and Sen (2004) showed that companies who have marketed organic food products were able to increase consumers' intake of organic foods within their diet.

Although a limited amount of research exists on the influence of CSR on consumer behavior, the results related to the cause supported by the company point into the direction of a clearly detectable influence. The next chapter will further assess how this influence may transfer onto unrelated consumer behavior and summarize current literature findings before introducing the research methodology.

4.2.3 Unrelated to CSR Cause

Although little research exists, it has been found by Pérez, del Mar García de los Salmones and Rodríguez del Bosque (2013) that CSR initiatives by the company do in fact have influence on consumers' emotions. Consequently, research suggests that a company's CSR behavior can influence consumers' moral behaviors in tasks not directly related to the company, its products, or the cause that is supported by the CSR initiative. However, it remains unclear to this day how those CSR actions influence unrelated behaviors, both positively and negatively (Newman & Brucks, 2018). While it can be agreed upon that recent findings suggest an influence on consumers' prosocial behavior after being exposed to CSR initiatives, companies and brands have yet to find out how to leverage their ability to influence consumer behavior (Negrão et al., 2018). The following part of this research will focus on finding out how CSR initiatives influence private consumer behavior such as resource and energy conservation, recycling, and general care for the environment in order to find out more and contribute to this largely unknown topic of research.

5 Research Questions and Hypotheses

The aim of this research is to determine the influence of CSR initiatives on the private conservation behavior of the consumer who has been exposed to advertisement of this initiative by the company. Overarching goal is not only to examine whether an influence arises from CSR initiatives being communicated conjointly with a product, but also to explain how this exposure to the company's CSR shapes consumer behavior by looking at a real-world example. The focus of the study presented in the following is above all on determining whether

individuals who are exposed to positive CSR actions of a brand report and display higher intentions to engage in environmentally and socially responsible behavior. Since it was expected that participants of the experiment would report environmentally friendly behavior if it was clearly detectable as a desirable outcome for the experiment, the questionnaire was designed to randomly assign the version including the CSR initiative to a limited number of participants in order to exclude potential biases. Additionally, a portion of the experiment seeking to identify environmentally friendly shopping behavior was aiming to simulate realistic shopping decisions, with only half of the questions targeting to actually evaluate consumer behavior. Finally, participants were asked to provide their impressions or guesses of the hypotheses in question, as well as their previous knowledge of the initiative used in this experiment. This experiment design therefore makes it possible to determine whether the participant might have guessed the aim of the experiment and allows for exclusion of participants who either knew the hypotheses beforehand or are familiar with the specific initiative mentioned in the experiment. As CSR has been and will continue to be a relevant topic for brands and consumers alike, but research has yet concluded limited findings concerning its influence on consumer behavior unrelated to the product, brand or company, the title of this research is: “The influence of a company’s communicated CSR initiative on private consumer behavior”. In the course of the discussion on the topic of CSR and private consumer behavior, two hypotheses were developed on the basis of the research questions discussed in Chapter 1, which are intended to enable a targeted investigation of the question.

H₁: The differences in evaluation of that brand with and without CSR initiatives will be influenced by the consumers’ support of the CSR issue. The evaluation gap will be greater the more supportive consumers claim to be of the issue at hand

H₂: Consumers who are exposed to a brand’s CSR initiative report higher intentions to engage in sustainable behavior than those who were not exposed to a brand’s CSR initiative

6 Methodology

Based on the theoretical part, which has presented the current research findings of CSR initiatives tied to possible effects on product and brand related, as well as private consumer behavior, the empirical part of this research paper contains a quantitative analysis of the influence of communicated CSR initiatives on private consumer behavior. In the following paragraphs, the hypotheses of the study are developed and presented on the basis of the underlying research questions. Subsequently, the method which was used to collect the data will be introduced, examined, and the research process will be explained further.

6.1 Research Method

In order to test the hypotheses in an objective manner, it is possible to use various data collection instruments. These instruments can be divided into the two main categories of qualitative and quantitative research. A qualitative instrument would be, for example, the expert interview, while the classical questionnaire can be assigned to the quantitative instruments. In qualitative research, the focus is on working on hypotheses relating to the interrelationships and effects of a given situation. Quantitative studies allow a larger sample to be interviewed, which means that the results are more representative than those of qualitative studies and can be applied to a previously determined overall population (Malterud, 2001). Due to the fact that conclusions about the overall population of consumers who are exposed to CSR initiatives conducted by a company are to be drawn within the scope of this work, a quantitative research method was selected.

In order to compensate for weaknesses of existing research on CSR and private consumer behavior and to prevent possible distortions, the data collection was carried out by means of an experiment considering a real brand, product, and initiative. By using the example of Adidas' Parley Ocean Plastic, it is possible to determine actual impact, since the product exists in the market and may be familiar to consumers. With the choice of a neutral running shoe as the product, it was ensured that participants were familiar with the product shown and their answers would not be influenced by an extravagant design or a product not everyone would know how to use. Additionally, only every third participant was shown the description of the shoe containing the CSR part. Another third was shown a description of the same length, but

describing a non-polluting, non-recycled material. The third group of participants served as a control group. Those who were shown the CSR initiative were prompted to answer additional questions about their previous knowledge on this particular product and initiative, as well as their support for the cause.

The experiment was carried out via the Internet, since an Internet-based experiment can reach a broad mass of potential participants. Further advantages are the ease of responding and filling out the questions and the low expenditure of time, which could lead to a higher response rate. In addition, the contact can be established directly and can also be personalized, e.g. in the form of an e-mail, social media posting or text message. Moreover, an Internet-based execution enables an accurate and fast evaluation of the results, as well as the possibility to make changes and to check the progress of the experiment. Two disadvantages of the traditional questionnaire can also be compensated or avoided by an experiment via the Internet. The detailed, electronic recording of response data and times prevents participants from answering questions too quickly and without reading them through. It can be assumed that questionnaires answered too quickly were not carefully read and processed and therefore contain no meaningful or valid answers. A distortion of the result can be prevented by disqualification of these answers. In addition, an Internet-based procedure allows participants to contact the creator of the questionnaire if questions arise. The indication of contact information at the beginning of the questionnaire opens the possibility of preventing a wrong answer due to misunderstandings and thus further distortions or questions that are left blank.

Adding to the previously mentioned product image and description that may or may not have included the CSR initiative depending on the participant, the experiment consisted of short questions regarding the brand behind the product as well as product and brand impressions and preferences. The second part of the experiment prompted participants to imagine a shopping situation in the supermarket and choose between hypothetical product sizes and packaging. The underlying aim of these ten questions, of which five were designed to be relevant for the findings, was to compute an environmental score for each participant in order to assess if the decisions he or she was making reflected a preference for environmentally friendly packaging. Non-relevant questions were added to disguise the true aim and avoid participants to answer what they felt was expected from them. The following part consisted of direct questions concerning personal consumption and sustainability habits. Participants were asked to indicate how they prefer to interact with brands and companies who display greater or lesser care for

CSR and the environment, as well as participants' conservation and recycling behavior and intentions. Finally, participants were asked to indicate demographics and their impression on the purpose of the study. The following chapter will go more into detail about the design and implementation of the study, as well as the method of data analysis that was chosen for the experiment.

6.2 Design and implementation of the study

Following the selection of a research topic and the creation of a knowledge base by means of literature and Internet research, a rough draft of the questions was prepared. The next step was to prepare the product photo and description to be used in the experiment. Since an immediate comparability of the data is essential, the analysis should be specialized on a product, which is familiar to the participants and can be described and defined by concrete characteristics. On this basis, the running shoe was selected as an exemplary product. The photo and product description were taken from the Adidas website (adidas AG, 2019). Primary aim was to select a product that features the Parley Ocean initiative (adidas AG, 2019a), which is advertised heavily by Adidas and features selected products that are entirely or partially made from recycled ocean plastic. This CSR example was selected because Adidas is a real, global brand known by the vast majority of consumers. It can therefore be assumed that participants of the experiment are familiar with the brand and have been exposed to similar advertisements or products regarding CSR initiatives. Consequently, using a shoe by Adidas as an example in this research promises a realistic depiction and analysis of potential effects on consumer behavior sought to be proven by means of this experiment. In order to ensure comparability and validity of the results, the experiment was designed with three possible product descriptions, of which only one was shown to the participant. The product photo remained the same. The description including the CSR initiative was taken from the Adidas website, containing information on the recycled material as well as the shoe's attributes and performance.

RAPIDARUN SHOE
A VERSATILE RUNNING SHOE

No matter whether on the treadmill in the gym, in the stadium or a round in the park, this running shoe does it all. It comes with a knitted upper and a TPU heel clip for more stability. The cushioning midsole also makes it comfortable.

The yarn used in the manufacture of this product was produced in collaboration with Parley. It consists partly of Parley Ocean Plastic™, which is made from recycled plastic waste collected from beaches and coastal areas before it can reach the sea.

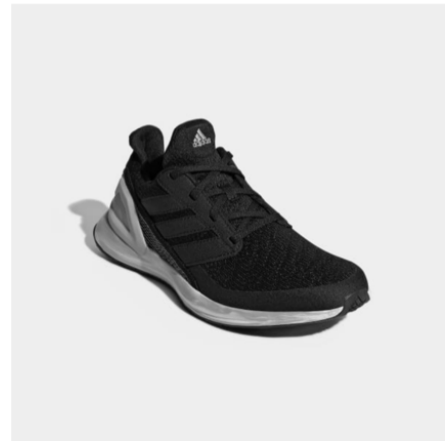


Figure 2. Product picture with description including CSR initiative (adapted from adidas AG, 2019)

The second product description used in the experiment was designed to assess differences in behavioral outcomes and intentions compared to those who have been exposed to the CSR description. In this version, the passage about the recycled plastic was removed, and a neutral statement about non-recycled, non-polluting material was inserted. Both descriptions are of the same length in order to avoid possible distortions that could have arisen with participants due to a longer text and more information to read, consider, and process throughout the experiment.

RAPIDARUN SHOE
A VERSATILE RUNNING SHOE

No matter whether on the treadmill in the gym, in the stadium or a round in the park, this running shoe does it all. It comes with a knitted upper and a TPU heel clip for more stability. The cushioning midsole also makes it comfortable.

The yarn used in the manufacture of this product was produced in collaboration with Parley. It consists partly of our primeknit yarn, which is made from a microfiber and cotton blend. The materials are sourced in European countries.

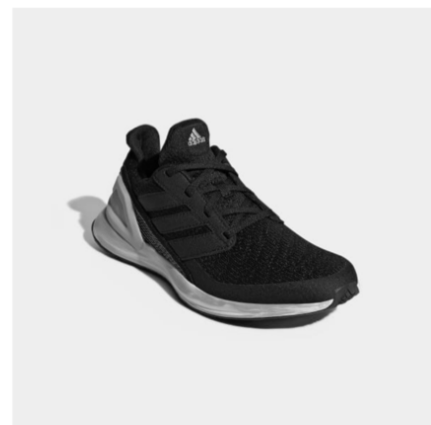


Figure 3. Product picture with neutral description (adapted from adidas AG, 2019)

The third possible description participant could have seen was a short version of the non-CSR description, not including the fictional information on materials, only the characteristics of the shoe itself. It was inserted as a safeguard in order to be able to attribute behavioral changes in participants between version one and two solely to the presence, respectively absence, of the CSR initiative.



Figure 4. Product picture with short description (adapted from adidas AG, 2019)

When a participant clicked the distributed link to the experiment, it was chosen at random which product description he or she would see. However, in order to ensure a minimum number of participants for each group, the experiment was designed to equally balance displays of the three alternatives.

Immediately following the picture and description of the shoe, the participants were asked to answer questions about their impression of the product, as well as level of trust and perception of responsibility of Adidas. Those who had seen the product description including the CSR initiative additionally answered questions about their previous knowledge on the topic as well as personal support and interest regarding the issue tackled by Adidas. In the following block, participants chose between two packaging alternatives of the same product. As previously mentioned, the desired outcome was to assess whether decisions were made considering the environmental impact of the choice, hence use of more packaging material. Five out of ten questions were designed to compute an environmental score for the participant, which then would be compared against the backdrop of which product description they had previously seen. The relevant questions concerned cookies, laundry detergent, yogurt, razors, and juice. The remaining questions were included to distract from the purpose of the question and present

common choices between products that may not only involve packaging decisions. Non-environmental choices were purposely made less expensive, in order to mitigate the effect of decisions based on price. The main idea behind this was to portray less wasteful packaging as the distinguishable aspect for a consumer decision. If it had been environmentally friendly and cheaper, the consumer choice would not have been attributable to the packaging but could have also been dependent on the price. Consequently, the reasoning of the results would have largely been up for interpretation, rendering them non-significant or speculative.

Cheese	150g block of cheese for 1,70€	150g of sliced cheese for 1,20€
Laundry detergent	Bottle of detergent for 16 washes for 4,00€	16 detergent pods for 3,70€
Strawberries	250g fresh for 2,50€	250g frozen for 1,50€
Rice	1kg uncooked for 1€	4 microwavable pouches of 250g for 0,80€
Coffee	500g of ground coffee for 4,50€	2 packages of 250g coffee beans for 4,30€
Razors	One razor with 3 exchangeable blades for 5,50€	3 disposable razors for 5€
Cookies	25 cookies in one wrapper for 1,05€	25 cookies wrapped individually for 0,95€
Juice	1-liter bottle for 2,50€	4 small bottles for 2€
Yogurt	500ml cup for 1€	4 cups of 125ml for 0,90€
Chocolate bars	10 bars of 15,2g for 1,50€	5 bars of 41,5g for 1,50€

Table 1. Experiment questions hypothetical product choices

After, participants were prompted to agree or disagree statements regarding their personal habits, centered around purchase decisions, brands, environment, pricing, responsibility, and sustainability. These statements were inserted to understand the consumers' own perceptions reflected against their choices made in part one as well as the potential effect the CSR initiative they had previously seen might have on their answers. Generally, it can be expected that participants try to portray themselves in the best way possible, however those statements are of relevance to better understand consumer habits and their beliefs in what influences their own decisions, compared to actual outcomes. Additionally, these types of statements may allow to identify a gap between consumer self-reflection and behavior. This can enable scholars to

propose measures for companies, agencies, or even governmental institutions who work on improving conscious sustainable behavior by setting appropriate incentives. Answers were measured on a seven-point Likert scale to ensure significant and accurate results in the participants' judgments of their own behavior (Allen & Seaman, 2007).

Statements						
○ I stop buying from a company that consciously harms the environment						
○ I am willing to pay more for well-known brands						
○ I trust familiar companies that I have known for a long time more than new companies						
○ I switch to brands who show a greater care for the environment if their products are equally good						
○ When I go shopping, I look for products that are environmentally friendly						
○ When I buy something, price is more important than the company's ethics						
○ I prefer to buy from companies that operate in an environmentally responsible way						
○ I am looking for ways to reuse old objects						
○ I buy used equipment whenever possible (cars, electrics, etc.)						
○ I seek representation by politicians who care about the environment						
○ Environmental claims on products have no impact on my decision						
○ I try to fix things first, instead of throwing them away immediately						
Possible responses on the scale						
Very strongly agree (1)	Strongly agree (2)	Agree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Disagree (5)	Strongly disagree (6)	Very strongly disagree (7)

Table 2. Statements regarding participants' personal habits

After indicating their personal position regarding these statements, participants also indicated which objects or materials they separate for recycling. Finally, participants were asked to indicate personal likings for the brand and knowledge of the specific initiative to exclude possibly biased answers. After entering standard demographic data, participants were prompted to guess the study's underlying aim and hypotheses. This was merely a precautionary measure in order to disqualify participants who have known or guessed the intention of the

study and could have given biased answers throughout the experiment. For a complete version of the experiment please consult Appendix 1.

After completing the experiment, it was tested by three individuals in a pre-test and improved according to the feedback. The data was collected via the Internet, the experiment was distributed via e-mail and social media. The experiment was disseminated by some participants to ensure that people of different ages, sexes, and educational backgrounds were reached. Overall, this resulted in a heterogeneous random sample with $N = 155$ participants. None of the completed experiments had to be classified as invalid, for example due to conspicuously fast responses or correct guesses of the hypotheses and aim of the study. Since the experiment took place via the Internet, all data could be recorded electronically and exported and evaluated electronically once the experiment had been distributed and answered by the participants. In the evaluation, the data obtained from Qualtrics (Qualtrics LLC, 2019), the platform used to design the experiment, was extracted and analyzed in SPSS (IBM Deutschland GmbH, n.d.).

7 Results

In the following chapters the results of the experiment will be presented. Due to the large amount of data obtained, only results closely related to the hypotheses H_1 and H_2 , thus contributing to their validation or refutation, are presented. Firstly, the sample will be described in more detail, in the next step the results of the empirical research will be presented, analyzed, and discussed.

7.1 Description of the sample

No specific sample was selected to carry out the experiment, since it is assumed that CSR issues addressed and advertised by the company affect every customer, especially in goods like shoes that are required, used, and bought by everyone. Therefore, the sample was not narrowed down according to age, gender or other socio-demographic criteria. One possible objection could be that children and young people in particular do not buy their clothing themselves and should therefore not be included in the study. Since the experiment took place via the Internet, however, only young people who are at least old enough to navigate on the Internet alone were included, the youngest participant being 17. From this age it can be assumed that they have already bought products, in this case shoes, for themselves and have also developed their own habits and routines when it comes to making purchasing and brand decisions, as well as forming opinions on current issues regarding society and environment. Especially due to the availability of news and exposure of young adults to serious global issues, it can be assumed that participants of this experiment, who were at least 17 years old, are mature enough to be considered in the data analysis and evaluation.

The total age range of the 155 participants, of which 149 indicated their age, is between 17 and 75 years. The mean age of the participants is 35.44 years, the median 28, with a standard deviation of 14.534. In order to facilitate evaluation and presentation, the participants were grouped according to their age. A distinction was made between adolescents and young adults (17 - 29), adults (30 - 59) and seniors (60 and older). The main reason for this distinction in this study's analysis is the assumed change in information and purchasing behavior in the course of digitalization, which has different effects on the defined groups. While young adults are more familiar with digital media, adults and seniors might rely more on traditional sources

of information, such as local sales staff, or their own previous experience (Wee, 2015). In the course of demographic change and taking into account the successively increasing retirement age, the group of senior citizens in this case was defined as 60 years and older.

17 to 29 years	30 to 59 years	60 and older
79 participants 53%	67 participants 45%	3 participants 2%

Table 3. Age distribution of experiment participants

Table 3 shows the distribution of the 155 participants among the three defined age groups. It is noticeable that the majority of the experiment participants belong to the "young adults" group. Participants older than 59 years were very sparse. One possible explanation for this is the Internet-based experiment. Although the dissemination via social media and networks addresses a large number of potential participants, these are almost exclusively young people, mostly also private contacts in their own age group. This effect is intensified by the fact that people who were personally asked to fill out the experiment and further distributed it, also most likely stayed within their own age group. Another possible explanation for the younger age of participants is the topic of sustainability. It may be assumed that in general younger people are more concerned about issues that have an eminent impact on the future, since they will be the group that is the most and longest affected.

For the entire sample of $N = 155$, 61 male and 93 female participants were recorded, one participant preferred to not indicate their gender, which represents .6% of total participants. The distribution between genders corresponds to 39.40% and 60.00% respectively. The distribution across the individual age groups ($N = 149$ due to the unavailability of data on both questions for six participants) is shown in Table 3.

Gender	17 to 29 years	30 to 59 years	60 and older
Male	31 participants (20.81%)	27 participants (18.12%)	1 participant (0.67%)
Female	48 participants (32.21%)	40 participants (26.85%)	2 participants (1.34%)

Table 4. Age-Gender distribution of experiment participants

It can be seen that the proportion of female participants is higher in all three age groups. One possible explanation for this imbalance could be the subject of the study. In general, female potential participants are more interested in fashion and clothing, as well as social causes, the environment, and sustainability (Hunter, Hatch & Johnson, 2004; Workman, 2010). Answers obtained on purchasing behavior and personal habits seem to confirm this suspicion.

Finally, the highest educational attainment of the participants was asked. Table 4 gives an overview of the distribution within the age groups (N = 149 due to the unavailability of data on both questions for six participants).

Education	17 to 29 years	30 to 59 years	60 and older	Total
Did not attend school	1 participant (0.67%)	0 participants (0.00%)	0 participants (0.00%)	1 participant (0.67%)
Secondary School (High School)	31 participants (20.81%)	35 participants (23.49%)	2 participants (1.34%)	68 participants (45.64%)
Bachelor's Degree	31 participants (20.81%)	11 participants (7.38%)	1 participant (0.67%)	43 participants (28.86%)
Master's Degree	16 participants (10.74%)	19 participants (12.75%)	0 participants (0.00%)	35 participants (23.49%)
Doctorate Degree	0 participants (0.00%)	2 participants (1.34%)	0 participants (0.00%)	2 participants (1.34%)

Table 5. Educational attainments distributed by age

While almost all educational attainment levels are represented in the first two age groups, no meaningful data could be collected for the age group 60 and older due to the low number of participants.

7.2 Influence of CSR initiative on shopping decisions

In order to determine the impact the CSR initiative has had on consumer decision making in a simulated shopping scenario (dependent variable), the data of those participants who have seen the initiative needs to be compared to the data of those who have not seen it (survey version as independent variable). In total, 47 participants out of 155 have seen the CSR initiative in the product description and have consequently also answered the added questions on their perception of the initiative. The number of valid participants does not amount to one third of

total participants because some answers needed to be excluded due to incomplete responses. Nonetheless, $N = 47$ represents a statistically significant sample size. 61 participants have seen the long product description, while 47 participants have seen the short version of the product description, excluding the CSR part.

The following analysis and discussion will focus on comparing the data on participants amongst all three participant groups, as the group with the short product description serves as a control group to mitigate distortions due to the fictional but neutral content of the product description.

As mentioned before, the simulated shopping decisions should portray the participants' attention to wasteful packaging and reflect importance of environmental product aspects when looking at the five relevant questions out of the total ten. These relevant questions and their answers were evaluated for both CSR and non-CSR participants. From the CSR participant group as well as the group with the short product description, 45 have answered the questions regarding their shopping behavior. From the non-CSR participant group with the long product description, 61 have made indications of their preferred choices.

In the first step of the analysis, the mean environmental score of the five relevant questions was evaluated. Since the environmentally friendly product choice corresponds to a mean score of 1, and the non-environmentally friendly choice to a mean score of 2, it can be suggested that a lower mean corresponds to more environmentally friendly product choices. The picture below shows an overview of the main descriptive statistics of the three participant groups.

CSR	N	Valid	45
		Missing	2
	Mean		1,2000
	Std. Deviation		,20449
	Variance		,042
Long	N	Valid	61
		Missing	0
	Mean		1,1967
	Std. Deviation		,22654
	Variance		,051
Short	N	Valid	45
		Missing	2
	Mean		1,2356
	Std. Deviation		,21863
	Variance		,048

Figure 5. Descriptive statistics of shopping decisions

As can be seen from the data, the mean scores for environmentally friendly shopping behaviors do not vary significantly among the three participant groups. The dispersion of scores measured through standard deviation and variance is also close to equal for the three groups. When looking at the distribution of scores achieved, there are also no significant effects among participants who have or have not seen the product description including the CSR initiative (for a visual distribution of the individual scores per participant group please refer to Appendix 2, Figures A.1 through A.3).

In order to determine the correlation between the nominal variable, that is which type of product description the participant has seen, and the scale variable, in this case the environmental score for the five responses given in this section, Eta was measured in SPSS, using crosstabulation of shopping decisions and the version of the product description with or without CSR. Eta indicates the strength of association between the two variables and is in this context appropriate to determine whether the inclusion of the CSR initiative in the product description may have affected the environmental score of participant groups in the shopping decision section of the experiment (Olejnik & Algina, 2003). The Eta value for shopping decisions as a dependent variable is $\eta = 0,079$. Squaring this number provides the information that 0,6241% ($\eta^2 = 0,006241$) of the variance in environmental scores among participants are determined by the type of product description shown, hence determined by whether the CSR

initiative was or was not included in the description. This result confirms what could already be suspected from looking at the descriptive statistics output in Figure 5. The CSR initiative in the product description did not influence participants to increasingly choose environmentally friendly products in their hypothetical shopping decisions.

7.3 Influence of CSR Initiative on Reported Consumer Behavior

Further analysis was conducted on the part of the experiment where participants had to indicate to which extent they agree with statements regarding conservation behavior, purchase decisions, brands, environment, pricing, responsibility, and sustainability. A seven-point Likert scale was used for these questions. For reliability analysis, Cronbach's alpha was calculated in order to assess the internal consistency of the subscale, which consists of ten questions evaluating consumer behavior. The internal consistency of the questionnaire is satisfying, with Cronbach's alpha for positive affect = ,776. Two questions concerning price and brand preference were excluded from analysis in order to emphasize the importance of environmental behavior and strengthen the focus of the analysis towards environmental behavior in order to guarantee and retain consistency.

In the first step of the analysis, the median score on the seven-point Likert scale (1 = very strongly agree; 7 = very strongly disagree) was evaluated. The relevant questions stated environmentally friendly behavior and were inverted for data analysis in SPSS in case of contrary wording. Furthermore, the check for internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha met satisfying conditions, so it can be suggested that a lower mean per participant group corresponds to more environmentally friendly behavior. The picture below shows an overview of the main descriptive statistics of the three participant groups. For this part of the analysis the median is used to measure the central tendency since Likert scale data is, contrary to the rest of the data analyzed in this sample, ordinal.

CSR	N	Valid	47
		Missing	0
	Median		3,0000
	Std. Deviation		,86389
	Variance		,746
Long	N	Valid	61
		Missing	0
	Median		2,5000
	Std. Deviation		,87622
	Variance		,768
Short	N	Valid	47
		Missing	0
	Median		2,5000
	Std. Deviation		1,09958
	Variance		1,209

Figure 6. Descriptive statistics of reported consumer behavior

As can be seen from the data, the median scores for reported conservation behaviors (dependent variable) do not vary significantly among the three participant groups (survey version as independent variable). Participants from the CSR group display a slightly higher median, indicating a lower degree of responsible consumer behavior than the groups who had not been confronted with the CSR initiative. However, it does not clearly point towards any correlation. Generally, most participants indicate an environmentally friendly behavior by agreeing with the statements presented to them. The dispersion of scores for this ordinal data is best measured by looking at the Inter-Quartile-Range (IQR). It shows whether responses are clustered or are more widely spread across the range of possible answers. Since the calculated IQR (confidence level of 95%) is relatively small for all three participant groups (1,00), it can be suggested that consensus exists among participants and answers cluster near the median.

In order to determine the correlation between the product description the participant has seen and the ordinal variable, in this case the reported consumer behavior measured by the ten questions, a Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted in SPSS. This testing method was chosen because again the data obtained does not follow a normal distribution and for similar cases delivers better results than an ANOVA would (Hecke, 2012). It is also an appropriate measure because it focuses on independent samples. When testing the independence of reported

consumer behavior from the type of product description seen with a 95% confidence interval, the SPSS output obtained from the Kruskal-Wallis test provides mean ranks for the different participant groups. This means that a lower rank corresponds to higher environmentally friendly behaviors. The results for the different participant groups can be seen in Figure 7 below.

	External Data Reference	N	Mean Rank
ConsumerBehavior	CSR	47	82,09
	Long	61	78,14
	Short	47	73,73
	Total	155	

Figure 7. Mean ranks for participant groups according to Kruskal-Wallis test

Interestingly, participants from the control group seem to have the lowest mean rank, while the CSR group has the highest, as was indicated in the descriptive statistics output. However, it is essential to look at the significance of the test in order to make a qualified statement about the possible correlation between participant groups and their reported behavior. Typically, the null hypothesis (H_0) for this type of test is that *there are no significant differences in reported consumer behavior caused by the type of product description*. In order to be able to reject or accept H_0 , the asymptotic significance (α) is of importance. Since $N > 30$, the asymptotic significance is a reliable measure of the significance level and can be consulted to reach a decision. If $\alpha > 0,05$, H_0 should be rejected. With a reported asymptotic significance of $\alpha = 0,653 (>0,05)$, H_0 can be rejected, concluding that the type of product description seen, thus the presence of the CSR initiative, has no significant influence on reported consumer behavior among participants.

In addition to statements about sustainable behavior, participants were also prompted to disclose which materials they recycle. This was deemed relevant since the CSR issue addressed by the brand in the experiment is directly connected to recycled materials and may have prompted participants in the CSR group to provide distinctive answers after being confronted with the initiative. Hereby, participants were asked to tick off up to six types of items they recycle, resulting in a maximum score of 6. Consequently, a higher mean among participant

groups constitutes higher quotas of recycled material. The picture below shows an overview of the main descriptive statistics of the three participant groups.

CSR	N	Valid	46
		Missing	1
	Mean		5,0870
	Std. Deviation		1,34703
	Variance		1,814
Long	N	Valid	60
		Missing	1
	Mean		5,2167
	Std. Deviation		1,00998
	Variance		1,020
Short	N	Valid	44
		Missing	3
	Mean		5,1364
	Std. Deviation		1,06947
	Variance		1,144

Figure 8. Descriptive statistics of recycling behavior

As can be seen from the data, the CSR group displays the lowest mean of recycled materials. However, the mean scores for recycled materials (dependent variable) do not vary significantly among the three participant groups (survey version as independent variable). Participants who have seen the long product description even claim to recycle the most. The dispersion of scores measured through standard deviation and variance is lowest for both participant groups that have seen the non-CSR description. When looking at the distribution of scores achieved, there are also no significant effects among participants who have or have not seen the product description including the CSR initiative. All three groups exhibit high recycling activity, with most participants claiming to recycle all of the materials available for selection (for a visual distribution of the individual scores per participant group please refer to Appendix 3, Figure A.4).

In order to determine the correlation between the product description the participant has seen and the scale variable, in this case the recycling behavior measured by the amount of recycled materials, Eta was measured in SPSS, again using crosstabulation of the amount of recycled

materials (dependent variable) and the version of the product description (independent variable) with or without CSR. The Eta value for recycled materials as a variable dependent on the product description is $\eta = 0,049$. Squaring this number provides the information that 0,2401% ($\eta^2 = 0,002401$) of the variance in recycling behavior among participants are determined by the type of product description shown, hence determined by whether the CSR initiative was or was not included in the description. This result confirms what could already be suspected from looking at the descriptive statistics output in Figure 8. The CSR initiative in the product description did not influence participants to reportedly recycle a greater amount of materials.

7.4 Evaluation of CSR initiative and perception of the brand

Participants who had seen the CSR initiative embedded in the product description, were prompted to indicate their support for the initiative and were asked whether or not they believe it is adequate for Adidas to address this problem (dependent variables). Answer format was again a seven-point Likert scale (1 = very strongly agree; 7 = very strongly disagree), thus lower median scores reflect a stronger support by participants. A total of $N = 46$ participants answered this question, providing the following output displayed in Figure 9:

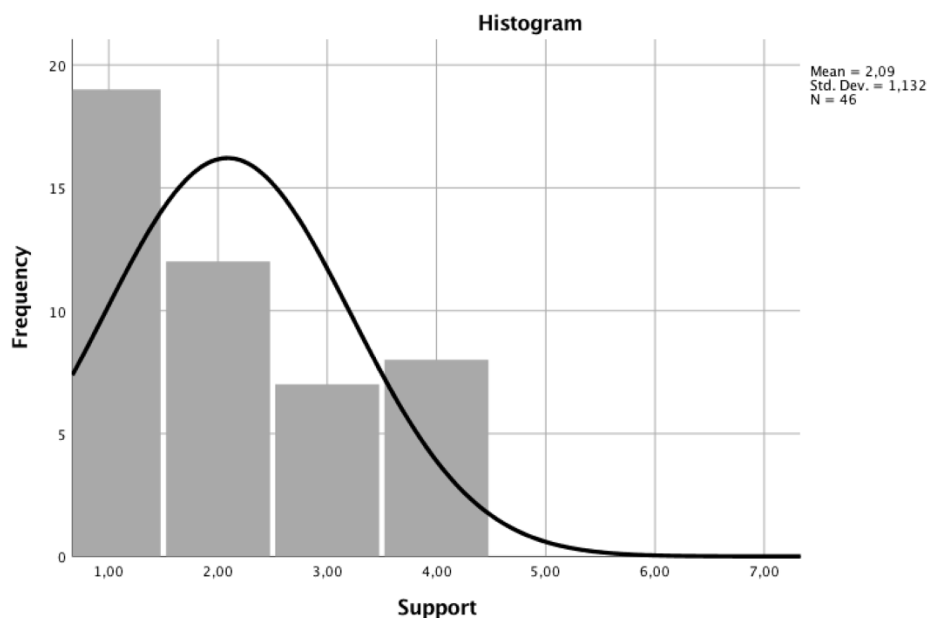


Figure 9. Support of CSR initiative as indicated by participants

It can be seen that with a Median $\tilde{x} = 2$, participants are in strong support of the initiative mentioned in the product description, and all participants either indicated their support or neutrality concerning the topic.

In a next step, all participants were asked to provide personal opinion and evaluation of the brand Adidas (dependent variables). Results indicate that for all participant groups (survey version as independent variable), more than 80% of participants answered “Yes” when asked whether or not they like the brand Adidas. The percentage of participants who answered “No” is lowest for the participant control group.

External Data Reference			Frequency	Percent
CSR	Valid	Yes	38	80,9
		No	7	14,9
		Total	45	95,7
	Missing	System	2	4,3
	Total		47	100,0
Long	Valid	Yes	52	85,2
		No	9	14,8
		Total	61	100,0
Short	Valid	Yes	42	89,4
		No	5	10,6
		Total	47	100,0

Figure 10. Overview of participants' answers

In two additional, Likert-scale based questions, participants were also asked to indicate their level of trust towards the brand (1 = Extremely trustworthy; 7 = Extremely untrustworthy) and whether or not they believe Adidas operates in a responsible manner (1 = Very strongly agree; 7 = Very strongly disagree).

		This company operates in a responsible manner	What is your level of trust in this company (Adidas)?
N	Valid	155	155
	Missing	0	0
Median		3,00	3,00
Std. Deviation		1,166	1,012
Variance		1,360	1,024

Figure 11. Overall brand evaluations by participants

As can be seen from the results, Adidas is overall evaluated positively ($\bar{x} = 3$) by participants. In order to assess whether participants who have been exposed to the CSR initiative evaluate Adidas more positively, the stronger they support the issue at hand (H_1), it was first looked at whether there even exists a difference in brand evaluation among participant groups. Running a one-way ANOVA in SPSS allows to detect significant changes in level of trust and perceived sustainability among participant groups. A requirement of the one-way ANOVA is that the variance of the participant groups is equal. This was tested using the Levene statistic, which provided a significance value of $\alpha = 0,512$, respectively $\alpha = 0,525$, for the two questions, indicating no real differences between variances ($\alpha > 0,05$). Looking at the F-statistic, which will provide us with the result of the ANOVA test, it becomes apparent that the level of significance (α) exceeds 0,05 for both questions, hence there is no statistically significant difference between participant groups. Meaning there was no real difference in brand evaluation among the participant groups, consequently it is redundant to analyze whether support for the initiative would change this evaluation, since there is no difference detectable to begin with. A detailed overview of the results can be seen in Figure 12:

		ANOVA				
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
What is your level of trust in this company (Adidas)?	Between Groups	,309	2	,154	,149	,862
	Within Groups	157,369	152	1,035		
	Total	157,677	154			
This company operates in a responsible manner	Between Groups	1,089	2	,545	,397	,673
	Within Groups	208,421	152	1,371		
	Total	209,510	154			

Figure 12. Result of one-way ANOVA on brand evaluation

8 Discussion

After the presentation of results in chapter 7, they are being linked to the hypotheses in this chapter. On the basis of the data collected, the hypotheses are verified or refuted in chapter 8.1. Subsequently, the results are classified into the current state of research and discussed on the basis of the theoretical basis in chapter 8.2. Finally, recommendations for the marketing of product-related CSR initiatives are given.

8.1 Verification of Hypotheses

Hypothesis H₁ states that differences in evaluation of the brand Adidas with and without CSR initiatives will be influenced by the consumers' support of the CSR issue. Furthermore, it specifies that the evaluation gap will be greater the more supportive consumers claim to be of the issue at hand. Using a real-world product description that for some participants contained a CSR initiative that is actually being carried out by Adidas, paired with a subsequent experiment on shopping decisions and personal conservation behavior, it was examined how brand evaluations vary between participants who had and had not been exposed to the CSR initiative in conjunction with a marketed product. Figure 11 and 12 show that the inclusion of the CSR initiative in the product description did not deliver significant changes in participants' evaluations concerning the brand and its perceived image as well as actions. Although this was only measured by two questions and there was no significant difference detected between groups, the median scores from all participants portray the brand in a good light already, allowing little room for improvement through CSR measures. Before the experiment outcome is examined and explained in more detail in chapter 8.2, the hypothesis H₁ can first be refuted at this point.

Hypothesis H₂ refers to the effect of CSR initiatives on private consumer behavior. Underlying belief is that the exposure to a brand's CSR initiative causes participants to report higher intentions to engage in sustainable behavior than those who were not exposed to a company's CSR initiative would. By simulating multiple shopping decisions between identical products with either environmentally-friendly or slightly more wasteful packaging as well as asking participants about their personal behaviors concerning recycling, purchasing decisions, conservation efforts and sustainability concerns, a tendency for the participant groups should

be established. The results obtained do not indicate a significant correlation between the CSR initiative and increased sustainable or environmentally friendly behavior. Slight variations occur among participant groups but are far from reaching a level of significance. Identical to H_1 , H_2 must be refuted because an effect can neither be detected nor clearly attributed to CSR efforts on the company's side.

8.2 Classification and Evaluation of Results

8.2.1 Potential Influencing Factors

In chapter 8.1 both hypotheses of this research had to be refuted on the basis of the results obtained in the experiment. Nonetheless, the results leave room for discussion as to why possible and expected effects did not occur within the scope of this research.

It should first be noted that the relatively small number of samples results in slight effects or distortions in the later analysis, which would be eliminated with a larger sample. Individual decisions may have influenced the result in such a way that effects, which have been discovered in previous research and were consequently expected to materialize in this research as well, remained hidden. Although results remain statistically significant with $N > 30$, a larger sample would have allowed for more informative and detailed results. Moreover, the inclusion of a control participant group caused the sample to be split into three groups instead of two, causing a smaller number of participants to be exposed to the CSR initiative. The control group was necessary in order to exclude uncertainty regarding the fictional product description that was added in place of the CSR portion for one participant group.

Another factor that could have potentially influenced the results was the subject of the experiment. For one, CSR is a prominent topic nowadays due to political discussions and initiatives. It can be assumed that most of, if not all of the participants have previously been exposed to similar initiatives or product claims, some even reported to be familiar with initiatives of Adidas, the company used in the experiment. Coming into the experiment with this type of awareness and a potential personal interest in the topic, participants may already be informed enough to acknowledge the initiative without having left room for improvement in their own behavior due to previous exposure to the topic which may already have caused a behavioral change in the past. Furthermore, Adidas is a popular brand, a fact that may have

influenced participants' perceptions of the brand and initiative as well. It was knowingly chosen because it is a real-world example that consumers are very familiar with, but of course this decision has its downsides. For one, participants may "forgive" a popular and familiar brand such as Adidas if they display unethical or polluting behavior. Additionally, other brand and product attributes that participants have been exposed to in the past may have overshadowed potential effects the product and initiative in this particular experiment may have had on the participants. This was a risk considered when choosing the brand, but nevertheless needs to be mentioned in this context again as it may have influenced participants. Another concern with choosing the brand Adidas is the brand image which, once consumers have formed it, may be rigid and not susceptible to change when introducing new information such as this experiment's initiative. By choosing running shoes as the product depicted in the experiment, some participants may have been confronted with a product they usually do not shop for and are not interested in. Aim of the experiment content was to choose a product familiar to everyone, hence shoes were chosen because it is assumed that every participant has previously bought shoes. Also, the neutral appearance and look of the shoe do not necessarily identify it as a typical sports shoe. However, it inhibits the risk that the product is not appealing to every participant, although the product is believed to be a good subject which does not distract much from the actual focus, which was the CSR initiative. Of course, lack of interest in the product may have caused participants to ignore, skip, or quickly read over the product description containing the CSR initiative, rendering it redundant. But this is a risk in every experiment and could partly be mitigated by looking at response times recorded in the experiment's software.

When looking at the suspected influence CSR initiatives may have on consumer behavior, both the results of the simulated shopping decisions as well as the self-reported behavior statements participants have made in the experiment need to be considered. It needs to be mentioned and kept in mind that the section of shopping decisions in the experiment only focuses on supermarket decisions. Participants may react differently when faced with other products on higher price levels, however the supermarket example was chosen because of its familiarity to everyone, also assuming every participant shops at a supermarket regularly, consumes and needs most of the products featured. However, it does not exclude the possibility of other motivational factors to choose a product besides its environmentally friendlier packaging. Although pricing was adapted to exclude decisions biased by a lower price level, other factors may have played a role in participants' decision making, such as practicality of goods packed

separately, or personal preferences. Furthermore, sustainable shopping behavior is a current topic, therefore participants may have already reflected and adapted their own behavior prior to this research, without being influenced in this scenario.

Regarding the statements given by participants in order to indicate their private conservation behavior, the outcome may have been influenced by the straightforward way the statements were composed. Contrary to the shopping decisions section, it was rather obvious that a positive and environmentally friendly behavior was a more desired response. Since it can be assumed participants are trying to portray themselves in a good light, this could explain the lack of differential outcomes among the participant groups. The same critique can be applied to the recycling question, here it was obvious that more materials indicate a “better” behavior. Although the internal consistency of the experiment section was satisfactory, there could still be room for improvement, and the summarization of the ten questions into one result to facilitate analysis may also have contributed to the lack of measurable effects. Another possible explanation for the results, ergo the lack thereof, in this section is the effect of *social loafing* described in chapter 3, which may have caused participants from the CSR group to feel like their personal contribution with their behavior matters less when compared to the CSR efforts of the brand. Consequently, participants from the CSR group may not have exaggerated in their responses or reflected their behavior in an overly optimistic way like the other two groups may have done.

As for the evaluation and perception of the brand and CSR initiative, the number of questions to measure brand perception and participants’ evaluation of the initiative was rather small. This was the case because the research was not intended to be affiliated with a specific brand and should therefore not focus too much on a specific product, brand or initiative. Furthermore, it was not the main aim of the research to investigate brand evaluation in detail.

8.2.2 Connection to Literature

Connecting the results from the experiment to the literature described in the first chapters in order to draw connections and classifications of the data obtained, it becomes evident that consumers value companies that engage in CSR behavior. Adidas displays a strong relationship to its consumers, fostering high purchase intentions and positive attitudes towards the brand,

which can partly be attributed to their past behavior. Since reputation affects consumer evaluations and choices, it may have been the case for Adidas that there was simply not enough potential to significantly influence participants with CSR. Adidas is a reputable brand and already considered superior by consumers, therefore consumers might disregard additional positive information. What adds to the effect of a strong brand is the prominence of the ecological debate currently happening in society and politics. The ubiquitous topic of environmental conservation and climate change may have caused participants to reflect their own behavior and contributions prior to participating in this experiment, and therefore closed the gap between CSR and non-CSR groups. Consumer reactions also tend to be more consistent if the company is perceived as “green” and the CSR cause is closely related to the brand. Adidas finds itself in transition with the introduction of recycled materials as part of their products and the aim to sustain on recycled plastic. An effect might have occurred in the recycling question, but it may also be too soon in the brand’s process of switching to sustainable materials.

The multifaceted nature of CSR may not cause visible effects in this research, since it affects the individual consumer differently. The indication of participants’ approval of the CSR initiative was included in the experiment in order to mitigate this effect, however there was still no significant correlation observed between CSR and private consumer behavior. This can also be attributed to the fact that it is yet unclear how consumers make trade-offs among product characteristics and how CSR initiatives play into this. Additionally, the effect of CSR measures cannot be generalized and transferred onto different consumer sectors. Since this research targeted a broad spectrum of consumers, results may have looked differently when observing only one specific segment, e.g. Millennials. Another influential factor found in the previously analyzed literature also needs to be considered in this research. Consumers, and therefore also participants in this research, attribute more credibility to external sources of information. This may offer an explanation for the fact that participants in this experiment reacted indifferently to the CSR portion of the product description, which came directly from Adidas and may have fostered skepticism among participants as to whether the statements are credible. Typically, CSR-initiatives that are product-related create more awareness among consumers, however this effect did not materialize in this research.

Moreover, the phenomenon that participants may tend to try and reduce their personal feelings of guilt by reporting positive behavior could have caused the results to barely differ among participant groups. Consumer reactions to CSR also depend on the emotional connection one

has with the brand, which is hard to measure and was not measured in this research due to the scope of the experiment. Although, it can be assumed that Adidas is not a very emotional brand, at least not connected to the chosen product (running shoe). The sports sector of the brand focuses on functional products, also the product description was very functional in this example. This functionality may have caused a low overlap of consumer and brand personality, which according to literature also contributes to small or no moral behavior changes, which in this case was true and consistent with the literature findings described in previous chapters. Furthermore, the bonding process of brand and consumer takes time, which was certainly not met with the short experiment and brand introduction. The *moral licensing* effect also needs to be addressed at this point. It states that individuals may act unethical after being exposed to CSR measures taken by companies. Consequently, it needs to be considered as another potential influence on the observed effects in this research.

Finally, it can be suggested, considering literature as well as research findings, that the effects CSR initiatives have on consumers are moderated by a number of factors that are not clearly distinguishable at this point in time. This is aggravated by the fact that CSR initiatives can have an effect on consumers' attitudes, but this is not necessarily reflected in their behavior and could therefore not be established in the context of this study.

8.3 Recommended Actions

Companies that are actively engaging in CSR initiatives or are considering implementing and marketing CSR measures can gain important insights through research on the subject of CSR and its effect on consumers. For example, statements can be made as to whether the communication and marketing of CSR initiatives can contribute to economic success or whether CSR initiatives can backfire if communicated poorly. Conversely, a successful marketing and communication plan where CSR cause and the company's cause are reconciled and presented in a tactical manner could lead to additional income and acquisition of new consumer groups, but also more educated and thoughtful consumers. The results of this study however indicate there is still no clear roadmap if and how CSR affects consumers in their private behavior.

Since no significant correlations could be found between presence of CSR connected to an advertised product and increasingly sustainable behavior among consumers, the communication of CSR initiatives by the company appears to be advantageous primarily for the company, for example to improve their image. Due to the fact that no significant effects could be found in this study, a company seemingly does not have to pay attention how their CSR initiatives impact the private behavior of consumers. As a result of factors previously discussed which could have impacted the research and consequently its results, it also cannot be refuted that there may in fact exist an effect of CSR initiatives on private consumer behavior. Further research on this extensive topic is needed in order to close the gap and provide answers on the multifaceted effect of CSR initiatives.

It can nonetheless be suggested that CSR initiatives, if communicated accordingly, can provide companies with positive outcomes. Existing research clearly points into this direction as environmental conservation becomes an increasingly important topic in today's society, politics and global markets. Deliberately influencing or changing private consumer behavior by communicating CSR initiatives in a certain way, however, lies not within a company's scope.

9 Conclusion

To introduce the topic of CSR and potential effects on consumers, the central research questions were first defined, and a theoretical basis was created. At the beginning, the process of information acquisition and processing was presented. The possible definitions of CSR and differences between CSR and Ethics, as well as the potential advantages and disadvantages were discussed. Subsequently, the role of CSR in communications and branding, including potential benefits on brand and product level, was examined. Most advantages of CSR and its communication to the consumers have been uncovered in previous research and served as important indications for the understanding of assumptions as well as results of the empirical part. In the last section of the literature review, the effects of CSR initiatives on consumers were discussed. By combining these with theory on consumer behavior and attitudes, important conclusions could be drawn regarding and possible impact of CSR initiatives on consumer behavior. Since current research on the influence CSR initiatives exert on private consumer behavior was not very advanced at the time of writing and was limited to a small number of studies, a compilation and combination of different theories and effects was necessary before research could begin. An interim conclusion was drawn at the end of each theoretical chapter. It stated the implications for consumer behavior as a response to CSR initiatives resulting from the previous section. After completing the theoretical basics and briefly describing the current state of research on CSR and private consumer behavior, hypotheses were developed. The aim of the research was not only to prove an effect of CSR initiatives on private consumer behavior, but also to investigate a possible connection with the support of the issue at hand and brand evaluation by the consumer. In the following part, the methodology of the experiment was presented, and the aim of the different question types was explained. Subsequently, the implementation of the data collection was described, and the sample was presented. By distributing the experiment via the Internet, almost exclusively people under the age of 60 were included. The presentation of the results showed no significant changes in reported conservation behavior among participant groups who had or had not seen a product description including a CSR initiative. In the discussion that followed, possible explanations for the lacking effects were determined, assessed and linked to the theoretical basis. The multifaceted nature of CSR initiatives, as well as their communication and outcomes, made it difficult to pinpoint effects by investigating these in an experiment focusing on only one specific product and brand from the real world, which may have contributed to biased answers. However, a weakness of

existing research could be compensated by questioning participants about a real brand, as well as simulating real shopping decisions that most participants are familiar with. Finally, a short recommendation for the communication and marketing of CSR initiatives with regards to their influence on consumer behavior was given.

Although no clear result could be established, this work contributes to the existing research on CSR's influence on consumer behavior. In summary, it can be stated that the communication of CSR by companies affects each consumer and their behavior differently, depending on their personal attitudes, motives and preferences. Therefore, marketing of CSR initiatives is recommended in order to trade on known advantages they can yield for the company, but a targeted use of CSR initiatives, with the aim of decisively changing or influencing consumer behavior, is not possible.

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9.1.1.1 Appendix 1: Experiment

Master Thesis Survey

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this survey.

As part of my International Master's in Management at the Nova School of Business and Economics (Nova SBE) and FGV EAESP, I am currently working on my thesis in the field of marketing connected to consumer behavior and information about companies.

In this survey you will read information about a company and will answer questions about this company and your habits.

Your answers given throughout this survey will remain completely anonymous and will only be used throughout the survey and data analysis. There are no right or wrong answers and it will take approximately 5 minutes.

In case of any doubts please contact me via e-mail: 33347@novasbe.pt

Thank you for your feedback and time.

Q Please look at the picture and read the provided product information

Picture short **RAPIDARUN SHOE**

A VERSATILE RUNNING SHOE No matter whether on the treadmill in the gym, in the stadium or a round in the park, this running shoe does it all. It comes with a knitted upper and a TPU heel clip for more stability. The cushioning mid-sole also makes it comfortable.



Picture CSR **RAPIDARUN SHOE**

A VERSATILE RUNNING SHOE No matter whether on the treadmill in the gym, in the stadium or a round in the park, this running shoe does it all. It comes with a knitted upper and a TPU heel clip for more stability. The cushioning mid-sole also makes it comfortable. The yarn used in the manufacture of this product was produced in collaboration with Parley. It consists partly of Parley Ocean Plastic™, which is made from recycled plastic waste collected from beaches and coastal areas before it can reach the sea.



Picture long **RAPIDARUN SHOE**A VERSATILE RUNNING SHOE No matter whether on the treadmill in the gym, in the stadium or a round in the park, this running shoe does it all. It comes with a knitted upper and a TPU heel clip for more stability. The cushioning mid-sole also makes it comfortable. The yarn used in the manufacture of this product was produced in collaboration with Parley. It consists partly of our primeknit yarn, which is made from a microfiber and cotton blend. The materials are sourced in European countries.



Q1 Would you consider buying this product based off the information given in the picture

- ☐ Definitely yes (1)
- ☐ Probably yes (2)
- ☐ Might or might not (3)
- ☐ Probably not (4)
- ☐ Definitely not (5)

Q2 What is your level of trust in this company (Adidas)?

- ☐ Extremely trustworthy (1)
- ☐ Very trustworthy (2)
- ☐ Trustworthy (3)
- ☐ Neither trustworthy nor untrustworthy (4)

- Untrustworthy (5)
- Very untrustworthy (6)
- Extremely untrustworthy (7)

Q3 This company operates in a responsible manner

- Very strongly agree (1)
- Strongly agree (2)
- Agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Disagree (5)
- Strongly disagree (6)
- Very strongly disagree (7)

Q4 Did you know about this particular initiative? *(displayed if CSR description shown)*

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q5 Do you think Adidas has to worry about this problem? *(displayed if CSR description shown)*

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q6 Is this initiative targeting a personal interest of yours? *(displayed if CSR description shown)*

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q7 I support Adidas taking action by undertaking this initiative *(displayed if CSR description shown)*

- Very strongly agree (1)
- Strongly agree (2)
- Agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Disagree (5)
- Strongly disagree (6)
- Very strongly disagree (7)

Now imagine you are shopping in the supermarket and are confronted with the following choices between two products. Please indicate which product you would choose based on the information given in this question

Q8 Please indicate your preferred choice *(order of questions randomized)*

Cookies (1)	25 cookies in one wrapper for 1,05€ (1)	25 cookies wrapped individually for 0,95€ (2)
Cheese (2)	150g block of cheese for 1,70€ (1)	150g of sliced cheese for 1,20€ (2)

Laundry detergent (3)	Bottle of detergent for 16 washes for 4,00€ (1)	16 detergent pods for 3,70€ (2)
Chocolate bars (4)	10 bars of 15,2g for 1,50€ (1)	5 bars of 41,5g for 1,50€ (2)
Yogurt (5)	500ml cup for 1€ (1)	4 cups of 125ml for 0,90€ (2)
Coffee (6)	500g of ground coffee for 4,50€ (1)	2 packages of 250g coffee beans for 4,30€ (2)
Razors (7)	One razor with 3 exchangeable blades for 5,50€ (1)	3 disposable razors for 5€ (2)
Strawberries (8)	250g fresh for 2,50€ (1)	250g frozen for 1,50€ (2)
Juice (9)	1 liter bottle for 2,50€ (1)	4 small bottles for 2€ (2)
Rice (10)	1kg uncooked for 1€ (1)	4 microwavable pouches of 250g for 0,80€ (2)

You will now be asked a few short questions concerning your personal habits. Please answer them honestly, there are no right or wrong answers and you will remain anonymous.

Q9 From the following selection of statements, please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with those statements (*order of statements randomized*)

	Very strongly agree (1)	Strongly agree (2)	Agree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Disagree (5)	Strongly disagree (6)	Very strongly disagree (7)
I prefer to buy from companies that operate in an environmentally responsible way (1)							
Environmental claims on products have no impact on my decision (2)							
When I go shopping, I look for products that are environmentally friendly (3)							
When I buy something, price is more important than							

the company's
ethics (4)

I trust familiar
companies that
I have known
for a long time
more than new
companies (5)

I am willing to
pay more for
well-known
brands (6)

I stop buying
from a company
that consciously
harms the
environment (7)

I seek
representation
by politicians
who care about
the environment
(8)

I switch to
brands who
show a greater
care for the
environment if
their products
are equally
good (9)

I am looking for
ways to reuse
old objects (10)

I try to fix
things first,
instead of
throwing them
away
immediately
(11)

I buy used
equipment
whenever
possible (cars,
electrics, etc.)
(12)

Q10 Please select all that apply I separate the following objects for recycling:

- ☐ Metal Objects (1)
- ☐ Glass (2)
- ☐ Papers (3)
- ☐ Plastic Packaging (4)
- ☐ Batteries (5)
- ☐ Small electronic devices (6)

Q11 Do you personally own a product of the brand shown in the beginning (Adidas)?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)

Q12 Do you like this brand?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)

Q13 Please name any specific initiatives undertaken by Adidas that you know of (environmental, social, etc.).

Q14 Please indicate your age

Q15 Please indicate your gender

- ☐ Male (1)
- ☐ Female (2)

Q16 What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

- ☐ Did not attend school (1)
- ☐ Primary school (2)
- ☐ Secondary school (High school) (3)
- ☐ Bachelor's degree (4)
- ☐ Master's degree (5)
- ☐ Doctorate degree (6)

Q17 What do you think is the purpose of this study?

Q18 Do you think part one and two are related? If yes, how?

Q19 What do you think is the hypothesis behind the study?

9.1.1.2 Appendix 2: Frequencies of Environmental Scores in Shopping Decisions per Participant Groups

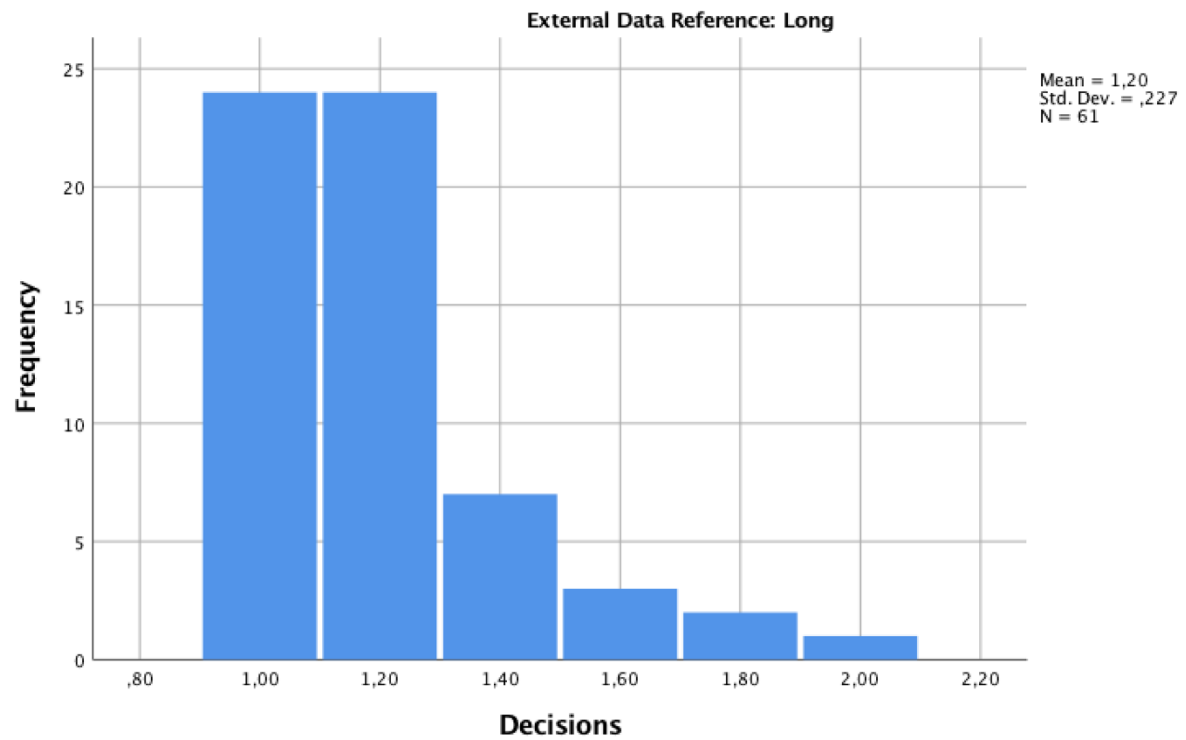


Figure A.1. Environmental Score for participants with long product description

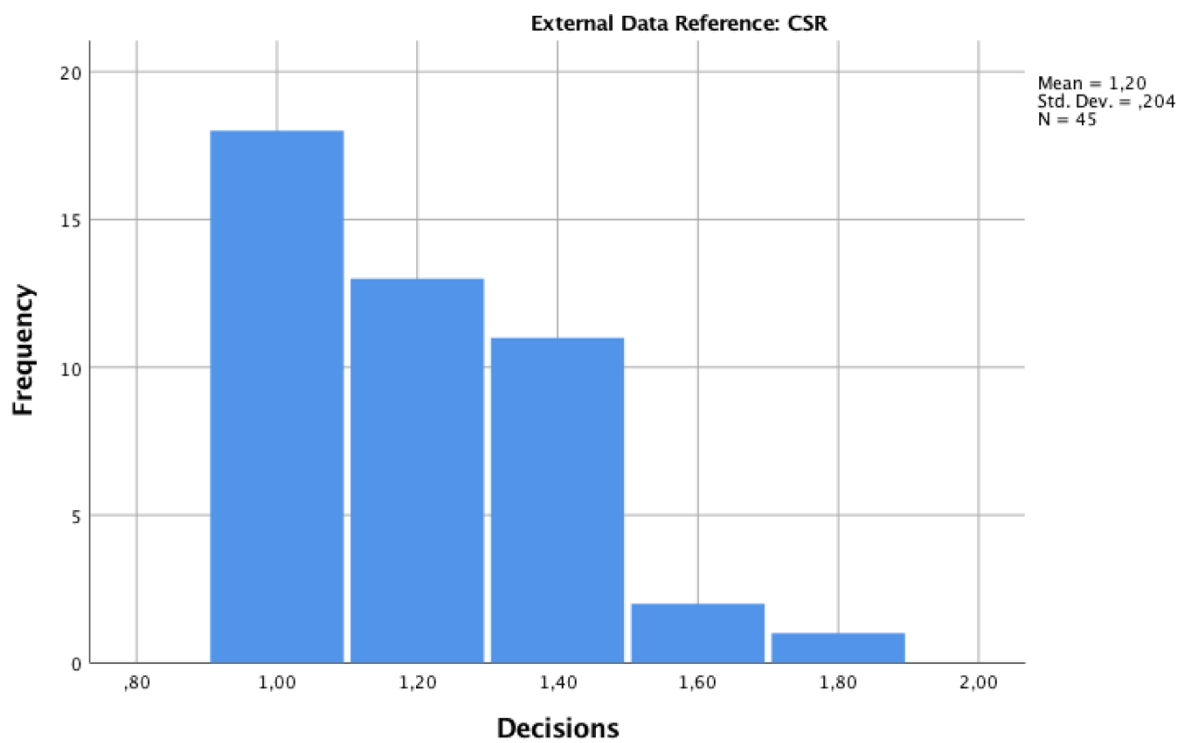


Figure A.2. Environmental Score for participants with CSR product description

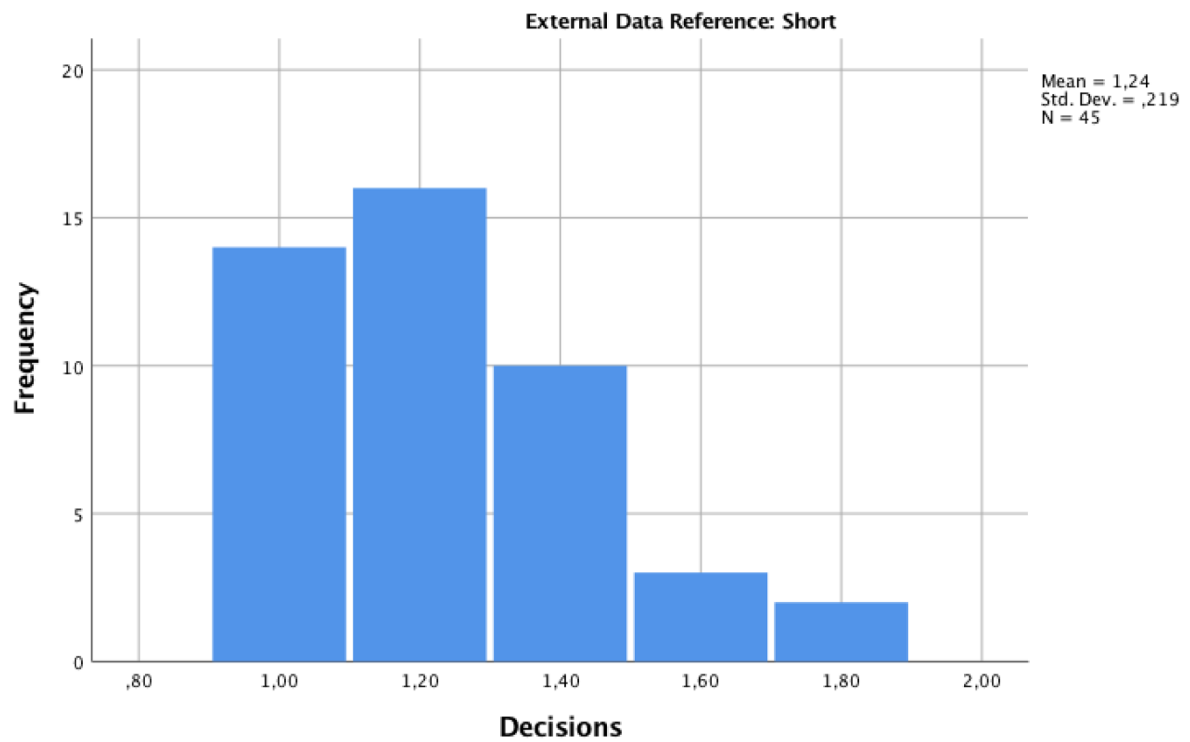


Figure A.3. Environmental Score for participants with short product description

9.1.1.3 Appendix 3: Number of Materials Recycled per Participant Group

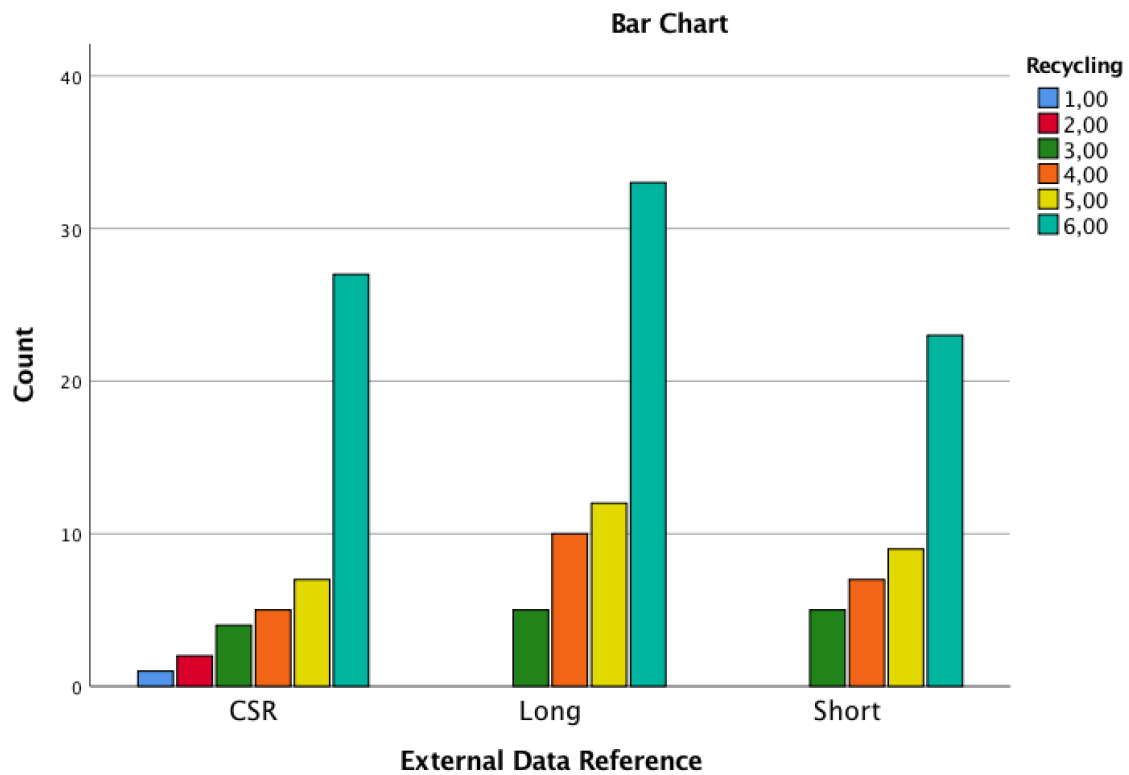


Figure A.4. Number of materials recycled per participant group