QUALITY OR RESPONSIBILITY? THE IMPACT OF TWO CATEGORIES OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY ON THE CONSUMER-BRAND RELATIONSHIP
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Given the increased interest and empirical research in corporate social responsibility (CSR) and irresponsibility, the present study identifies two categories of corporate information – corporate operational performance (COP) and corporate social performance (CSP) – to test and predict their respective impact on consumer brand advocacy and brand trust. Through an empirical study, the results from three-way interactions suggest that product the valence of CSR and the product involvement has moderating effects on brand advocacy. However, such moderating effects on brand trust are only found in high involvement products. Managerial implications and future research are also included in terms of applying these results for buzz marketing and cause-related marketing strategy development.

INTRODUCTION

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives have become increasingly popular among corporations. However, the nature of CSR has been debated for decades. Brown and Dacin (1997) present CSR as two components: (1) the corporate ability relative to a company's expertise in producing and delivering its products/services; and (2) a company's image or reputation relative to its value system (Homburg, Stierl, & Bornemann, 2013), soul, or character (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). The purpose of this paper is to examine a fundamental, yet unexplored, question: Do consumers respond differently to these two specific types of CSR information? In answering this question, this paper first defines two major dimensions of CSR, namely, corporate operational performance (COP) and corporate social performance (CSP). The former captures a company's publicly released information regarding product quality and innovativeness capability (Gatignon & Xuereb, 1997; Rust, Moorman, & Dickson, 2002); the latter includes a company's activities and status related to its perceived societal or stakeholder obligations (Korschun, Bhattacharya, & Swain, 2014). The particular interest of this paper is given to the impacts of COP and CSP on the consumer-brand relationship. An assumption is that successful relationship marketing requires

trust as the cornerstone (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2001) and relies on advocacy to flourish (Berens, van Riel, & van Bruggen, 2005). This study aims to reveal the relationship between COP/CSP and brand advocacy and brand trust. In this consumer-brand continuum, customers evaluate brand trustworthiness by two scopes: (1) the product or service the firm offers (i.e., product brand) that is usually associated with COP; and (2) the firm which provides the products and services (i.e., corporate brand) that is connected with CSP. In addition, consumer response to brand trust and brand advocacy will be moderated by product involvement. The objective of this study is to add to the body of empirical research in CSR by demonstrating that COP and CSP information can be applied to a consumer–brand relationship context.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. Following a literature review of related constructs is the development of the theoretical framework. A laboratory experiment to test the hypotheses then follows. After presenting the results, this paper posits a discussion of the findings in terms of academic contributions and managerial implications. Finally, this paper concludes with several future research areas in this domain.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

In the past two decades, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been an important area of research in brand equity. Consumers may associate CSR with a positive product and its evaluations, brand recommendations, and brand choice (e.g., Olsen, Slotegraaf, & Chandukala, 2014). On the other hand, negative CSR, or corporate social irresponsibility (CSI), can impair brand equity by weakening consumers' brand evaluations and purchase intentions (Dawar & Pillutla, 2000; Armstrong, 1977). In general, the makeup of CSR or CSI comes from two categories of activities: (1) its operating performance-related activity (Krasnikov & Jayachandran, 2008); and (2) its symbolic- or value-related activity (Pullig, Netemeyer & Biswas, 2006).

Consumers usually employ a company's operating performance ability to assess its expertise and manufacturing capability (Brown & Dacin, 1997) or the quality of its products and services (Escrig-Tena & Bou-Llusar, 2005), cost efficiency, flexibility, logistics, business process capability and production competence (Homburg et al., 2013). Along with the growing complexity of products and services, product-harm crises have become more and more frequent, whereas consumers have tremendously increased the needs of rigid product-safety legislation (Dwar & Pillutla, 2000). If a company fails to meet such laws and leads to large-scale damages, consumers will view this firm as socially irresponsible. Such examples include BP's oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, Toyota's brake flaw, Tylenol's terrorist capsule poisoning, MapleLeaf's contaminated meat products, etc. Accordingly, this paper labels product-related CSR and CSI information as Corporate Operating Performance (COP), CSR-COP and CSI-COP, respectively.

Another dimension of CSR or CSI is social in nature and non-product related (Homburg et al., 2013; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). It (1) delivers wider societal value, including the support of health and human rights improvements (e.g., discrimination, labor abuses), and environmental protection; (2)

contributes to regional development and global partnerships for sustainable development; and (3) addresses in a balanced way key stakeholder concerns. This type of CSI may do harm to a brand's symbolic benefits (Pullig et al., 2006). For instance, Nike was criticized for physically and mentally abusing its workers in the contracted manufacturers in Third World (e.g., Indonesia). Another similar example is McDonald's being accused of animal cruelty and employee exploitation. Indeed, word-of-mouth research has examined both product and non-product CSI information (Mahajan, Muller, & Kerin, 1984). Accordingly, this paper labels social or ethical value-related CSR and CSI information as Corporate Social Performance (CSP), CSR-CSP and CSI-CSP, respectively.

Brand Advocacy

Brand advocacy is a generalized tendency to share brand information or knowledge within a product class in order to benefit others in their purchases and consumption (Herr, Kardes, & Kim, 1991). Brand advocacy, closely linked to the altruistic tendencies of individuals, is similar to the concepts of opinion leadership (Childers, 1986), marketplace helping behavior, and market mavenism (Feick & Price, 1987; Huang, 2010), in that it is an individual difference variable grounded in the consumer information exchange about marketplace activities to promote positive marketplace experiences. Consumers who play the role as brand advocator may indeed enjoy sharing shopping information with others and are actively involved in helping others to navigate the marketplace (Feick & Price, 1987; Huang, 2010). From the perspective of a marketer, brand advocacy aims to build deeper customer relationships by earning high levels of trust and commitment (Leisen & Hyman, 2004; Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

It is widely accepted that consumer advocacy intention will be stronger if a brand provides superior benefits (Brown, Barry, Dacin, & Gunst, 2005). Based on the descriptions of Corporate Operating Performance (COP) and Corporate Social Performance (CSP) in the previous section, a company's CSR is a collective assessment of its ability to provide valued outcomes to a representative group or stakeholders. It is a key source of

distinctiveness that produces support for the company and that differentiates it from rivals. Thus, consumers may be willing to advocate a brand because they perceive some unique values and benefits resulting from its CSR presence that no alternative brand can provide. Such satisfied brands, as a result, should be purchased or be intended to purchase more often. Furthermore, consumers who are pleased with the CSR brand are likely to be a source of word-of-mouth (WOM) advocators (Brown et al., 2005; Barlas & Huang, 2009).

Although the construct of brand advocacy and its antecedents have been assessed in marketing and consumer behavior literature (Duhan, Johnson, Wilcox, & Harrell, 1997), empirical evidence on the nature and extent of the impact of COP and CSP information as predictors in a single framework of consumer-brand relationship is scarce. This paper collectively investigates two dimensions of brand advocacy – purchase and WOM intentions – to predict subsequent advocate behaviors. Since some empirical studies have revealed that brand advocacy varies by products, industries, and situations (e.g., Cronin, Brady, & Hult, 2000), this study will examine consumer brand advocacy by using high versus low involvement product classes.

Brand Trust

Brand trust is important as it transforms a positive transactional orientation toward a brand into an enduring and close personal – even committed – relationship with a brand. Morgan and Hunt (1994) suggest that brand trust is one of the "key variables" to maintaining a valued consumer-brand relationship, to avoid seeking new relational exchanges with alternative brands, and to reduce the perceived risks in the environment. As demonstrated by Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh (1987), trust influences subsequent customer behavior (e.g., repeated purchase) and attitudes (e.g., psychological or emotional attachment), which is specifically pertinent to uncertainty where there exists image incongruity, information asymmetry, or in brands with traditional negative images (Doney & Cannon, 1997). Consumers trust brands that are good and honorable, empathetic, and hold positive brand images and personalities (Chaudhuri &

Holbrook, 2001). Brand trust thus can be viewed as the keystone and one of the most desired traits in a consumer-brand relationship, which is seen as a substitute for human contact between the company and its customers (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003).

Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) suggest that brand affect and brand trust are separate constructs but combined to influence brand loyalty. They define brand trust as "the willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function (p. 82)." Similarly, Dawar and Pillutla (2000) describe brand trust as reliability and dependability based on the consumer's belief that a brand has certain qualities that make it consistent, competent, honest, and responsible. Since customers are more likely to choose brands they believe to be trustworthy and reliable, brand trust is thus the most important attribute any brand can have (Doney & Cannon, 1997), and can influence the strength of consumer-brand relationship (Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012). In relational exchanges, trust was defined as the expectations held by the consumer that the service provider is dependable and can be relied on to deliver on its promises (Sirdeshmukh, Singh, & Sabol, 2002).

Commonly found in marketing literature, brand trust is reported as a two-dimensional idea (Doney & Cannon, 1997; Ganesan, 1994; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). The first dimension of brand trust is technical, or of competence-based nature, involving the ability and willingness to keep promises and satisfy consumer needs. The second dimension comprises the attribution of good intentions to the brand in relation to the consumers' and well-beings' interests as well as welfare. A trustworthy brand relies more on understanding real consumer needs and fulfilling them than does the particular service or product. It is not merely responsive, but responsible. This two-dimensional brand trust framework is consistent with the categories of COP and CSP information. This paper proposes that the core component of trust, differentiating it from future expected performance, is perceived motivation of the brand that derives from altruism, integrity, or a combination of the two (Moorman, Deshpande, & Zaltman, 1993;

Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Hess, Ganeson, & Klein, 2003). Positive corporate operating performance information (i.e., CSR-COP) may contribute to increasing consumer brand trust, whereas negative cooperate operating performance information (i.e., CSI-COP) can lead to increasing the uncertainty and risk associated with a brand and thus decrease brand trust.

Corporate Social Responsibility as Diagnostic Information

A large amount of previous corporate social responsibility research has focused on the impact of information accessibility on brand evaluation. For instance, Dawar and Pillutla (2000) indicate that the positive pro-attitude of familiar brands decreases the impact of CSI-COP on brand evaluations (Study 3). When facing the CSI-COP information of a familiar brand, consumers' previous brand experience permits them to easily retrieve the pro-attitudinal information and thus diminishes the impact of such information on brand evaluation. When facing the CSI-COP information of an unfamiliar brand, consumers' former attitude toward the brand may not be easily retrieved. Consequently, consumers evaluate the brand unfavorably on the basis of using CSI as the prime information. Indeed, the accessibility-diagnosticity theory can be used to explain the diagnostic role of COP information in brand evaluations.

According to the accessibility-diagnosticity theory (Feldman & Lynch, 1988; Lynch, Marmorstein, & Weigold, 1988), information is more likely to be used for specific evaluations when it is easily recalled and when the information is perceived as useful for the evaluation (Herr et al., 1991). More recently, Dawar and Lei (2009) have examined the moderating role of brand knowledge between CSI-COP and its relevancy. Their studies suggest that when consumers are not familiar with a brand, they have limited knowledge about the brand, which makes it difficult for them to judge the relevance of the crisis for the brand. As a result, the CSI-COP leads to unfavorable brand evaluation regardless of its relevance to the brand. When consumers are familiar with a brand, their brand knowledge helps them judge the seriousness of the CSI-

COP information, depending on the relevance of the product crisis, and thus influences the result of brand evaluation.

This moderating role of brand knowledge may be explained by the level of product involvement (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985). When facing an unfamiliar compared to familiar brand or product, consumers usually experience a higher level of uncertainty or perceive risk in the decision-making process (Zaichkowsky, 1985). Consumers with a high degree of involvement have high perceived risk and consumers with a low degree of involvement have low perceived risk. Therefore, consumers with a high degree of product involvement actively look for information related to the product and evaluate all the alternatives, whereas consumers with a low degree of product involvement do not (Cox, Cox, & Zimet, 2006).

Consumer involvement is a multidimensional construct consisting of an individual's subjective sense of the concern, care, importance, personal relevance, and significance attached to an attitude of a product, a product class, or a specific product category (Olsen, 2007; Coulter, Price, & Feick, 2003). Previous marketing research has empirically suggested a moderation effect of involvement on the attitude–behavioral relationships (Beatty, Kahle, & Homer, 1988). For high involvement products or brands, consumers rely on elaborate information processing and product-related thoughts to make inferences and judgment in terms of the brand's qualities and traits (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2001), such as corporate operating performance information.

Compared with CSP, for instance, COP information on qualities and traits about high involvement products may elicit stronger brand affects. Berens et al. (2005) have partly supported this postulation. They observe that COP information (i.e., product and service quality, the expertise of employees and management) has a significant, positive effect on brand evaluations, whereas CSP does not. In line with the accessibility-diagnosticity framework, their results have empirically supported that COP is more *diagnostic* in brand evaluations than CSP.

According to the nature of COP information, it is not surprising that the value of COP as a strong effect on consumer's judgment. Research on categorization suggested that individuals categorized information in a manner of cognitive efficiency (Cohen & Nakamoto, 1987; Rosch, 1975). As the negative COP (CSI-COP) has stronger negative input on brand evaluation than negative CSP (CSI-CSP), especially for high- compared to low-involvement product. This paper argues that the valence of CSR information has a directionally consistent effect on brand evaluation (Herr et. al 1991; Grewal, Cline, & Davies 2003). For instance, positive COP (CSR-COP) is more diagnostic than CSR-CSP for high-involvement product whereas an opposite patter can be the situation for low-involvement product.

As an unobservable state of motivation, arousal, or interest toward consumption (activity) of a product or object (Olsen, 2007), the moderation role of product involvement on the relationship between CSR and brand affect has not been widely tested. This paper thus aims to provide some empirical evidence that the exposure of CSR-COP may strengthen consumer brand advocacy, such as purchase intention, evaluation of the corporation, and WOM communications, etc., especially when the brand is in the high involvement product categories. On the other hand, when consumers look at low involvement products, CSR-CSP becomes more diagnostic than COP information for brand evaluation and advocacy. In sum, the hypotheses are:

   H_1: CSP has a stronger effect on brand advocacy than COP for low-involvement products.
   H_{1a}: CSR-CSP information has a stronger positive effect on brand advocacy than CSR-COP information for low involvement products.
   H_{1b}: CSI-CSP information has a stronger negative effect on brand advocacy than CSI-COP information for low involvement products.
   H_2: COP has a stronger effect on brand advocacy than CSP for high-involvement products.
   H_{2a} CSR-COP information has a stronger positive effect on brand advocacy than CSR-CSP information for high involvement products.

   H_{2b}: CSI-COP information has a stronger negative effect on brand advocacy than CSI-CSP information for high involvement products.
   H_3: CSP has a stronger effect on brand trust than COP for low-involvement products.
   H_{3a}: CSR-CSP information has a stronger positive effect on brand trust than CSR-COP information for low involvement products.
   H_{3b}: CSI-CSP information has a stronger negative effect on brand trust than CSI-COP information for low involvement products.
   H_4: COP has a stronger effect on brand trust than CSP for high-involvement products.
   H_{4a}: CSR-COP information has a positive effect on brand trust than CSR-CSP information for high involvement products.
   H_{4b}: CSI-COP information has a stronger negative effect on brand trust than CSI-CSP information for high involvement products.

METHOD

Design

The study was a 2 (COP: CSR-COP vs. CSI-COP) × 2 (CSP: CSR-CSP vs. CSI-CSP) × 2 (Involvement: high vs. low) between-subject design. A total of 326 commerce major undergraduate students from a major North American university were recruited for the current study and another 55 students from the same program were recruited for pretests. Each student received a half course credit for the participation.

Stimuli

A fictitious company producing juices [*Company XYZ*] was used as the low involvement product category and another fictitious company manufacturing TV sets was used as the high involvement product category. Results from a pretest (*n*=27) indicated that the involvement in the TV set product category was significantly higher than that of the juice product category on a three-item measurement (Olsen, 2007): important/unimportant in my daily life; motivated/unmotivated to search

product information before making purchasing decision; concerned/unconcerned about making the purchase decision (Cronbach α = .93, M_{TV} = 5.15 vs. M_{juice} = 2.98, $p < .001$; 1=disagree, 7=agree) among participants. Juices and TV sets were selected as the target product categories, because students in the subject pool (third and fourth year undergraduate students) were familiar with these product categories. Different from other consumer-brand relationship studies, the nature of this research is related to the impact of CSR and CSI information on individuals' attitude and behavioral intentions rather than on the attitude change in a customer-brand relationship. Thus, fictitious brand names can eliminate contaminations resulting from the subjects' existing attitudes and beliefs toward a known brand.

Manipulation Check

The type of corporate social responsibility information was manipulated into COP and CSP categories. Subjects expressed their agreement with the statements on a seven-point Likert scale anchored by disagree/agree. For COP, two specific corporate ability performances were considered: product/service quality (including logistics) and innovativeness capability (Gatignon & Xuereb, 1997; Rust et al., 2002). The quality of existing products/services is essential for keeping a firm's current customers happy, whereas innovation is essential for reaching new customer bases and gratifying ever-changing customer needs (Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006). Prior studies have confirmed that a company's ability to provide a superior product/service quality is critical to its long-term survival and success (e.g., Mittal, Sayrak, Tadikamalla, & Anderson, 2005; Rust et al., 2002). In a similar fashion, two items from Berens et al. (2005) were adapted to measure COP: *Do you think that [company name] offers high-quality products? Do you think that [company name] develops innovative products/services?* (Cronbach α = .96).

For CSP, Fombrum, Gardberg, and Sever's (2000) reputation quotient scale captures several aspects of corporate reputation, including social and environmental responsibilities. Two items from Berens et al. (2005) were adopted to measure CSP: *Do you*

think [company name] supports good causes? Do you think that [company name] behaves responsibly regarding the environment? (Cronbach α = .94).

Positive and negative target messages of *Company XYZ* were developed through a series of pretests. In the final pretest, 28 subjects were exposed to one of the four versions of messages: CSR-COP, CSR-CSP, CSI-COP, and CSI-CSP. Subjects were asked to rate "How favorable or unfavorable was the presented message towards the target brand?" on a seven-point scale. The messages were rated as significantly different in their valences but not in their extremity. They were also rated as equivalent in their believability ($p > .78$) (see Appendix).

The dependent variables were (1) brand advocacy: *Generally speaking, [company name] is satisfying*; *if a friend were looking for a product of this type, would you advise him or her to purchase this product? Would you purchase this product?* (Cronbach α = .97); (2) brand trust (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001): *I trust this brand*; *this is an honest brand*; *this brand is safe* (Cronbach α = .91).

Procedure

All recruited subjects were invited to a large classroom and were told that this study was interested in their opinions about a company producing juices or a company manufacturing TV sets. They were then randomly assigned to eight experimental conditions and exposed to the related company's CSR or CSI information. Next, all subjects were asked to finish a paper-and-pencil questionnaire including COP and CSP ratings. After that, subjects were then told that this company had recently introduced a new juice drink/a new model of TV set, with the product descriptions, and asked to provide a purchase intention rating with the assumption that they were interested in buying a juice for their breakfast/buying a TV set for their apartment. Finally, subjects were explicitly debriefed about the study. Subjects were quizzed on whether they had guessed the purpose of the experiment. None of the subjects had.

Analysis

The hypotheses implied a three-way interaction among the treatment condition manipulations: the types of corporate social responsibility information, the valence of the information, and product involvement. A regression model was used to analyze the data:

$Y_k = b_0 + b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + b_3X_3 + b_4X_1X_2 + b_5X_1X_3 + b_6X_2X_3 + b_7X_1X_2X_3$ (1)

where

Y_i: $k = 1$ brand advocacy; $k = 2$ brand trust (dependent variable)

X_1: the types of information (0 = CSP; 1 = COP) (independent variable)

X_2: the valence of information (0 = CSR; 1 = CSI) (moderator)

X_3: the product involvement (0 = low; 1 = high) (moderator)

The results of the regressions on brand advocacy and brand trust are presented in Table 1.

To illustrate the effects of the interactions in the regression model, simple slope analysis was adopted for this purpose. The terms in the equation (1) were reordered into two groups: the first group (terms that do not contain X_1) defines the intercept while the second group (all the terms that contain an X_1) defines the simple slope in the equation (2):

$Y_k = \gamma_{0i}(b_0 + b_2X_2 + b_3X_3 + b_6X_2X_3) + \gamma_{1i}(b_1 + b_4X_2 + b_5X_3 + b_7X_2X_3) X_1$ (2)

where γ_{0i} is the intercept and γ_{1i} is the simple slope, $i = 1, 2, 3, 4$.

As the independent variable X_1 is coded as: 0 = CSP and 1 = COP, thus the simple slope coefficient, γ_{1i}, in equation (2) shows the relationship between CSP (and the moderators) and the dependant variables. To examine the relationship between COP and the dependant variables, X_1 is recoded as X'_1 (0 = COP, 1 = CSP) and the simple slope coefficient is γ'_{1i} in equation (3).

$Y_k = \gamma'_{0i}(b_0 + b_2X_2 + b_3X_3 + b_6X_2X_3) + \gamma'_{1i}(b_1 + b_4X_2 + b_5X_3 + b_7X_2X_3) X'_1$ (3)

The moderator X_2 is defined as X_{20} (CSR, i.e., $X_2 = 0$) and X_{21} (CSI, i.e., $X_2 = 1$). The moderator X_3 is defined as: X_{30} (low involvement, i.e., $X_3 = 0$) and X_{31} (high involvement, i.e., $X_3 = 1$). Thus altogether there are four manipulated combined conditions: (i) X_2 and X_3, are both equal to 0: $X_{20}X_{30}$, (ii) X_2 equals to 0 and X_3 equals to 1: $X_{20}X_{31}$, (iii) X_2 equals to 1 and X_3 equals to 0: $X_{21}X_{30}$, and (iv) X_2 and X_3, are both equal to 1: $X_{21}X_{31}$.

In total, there are eight experimental conditions for each dependent variable: when CSP = 0 and COP = 1 (i.e., X_1), four simple slopes are generated as γ_{11}, γ_{12}, γ_{13}, and γ_{14}, respectively; when COP = 0 and CSP = 1 (i.e., X'_1), another four simple slopes are generated as γ'_{11}, γ'_{12}, γ'_{13}, and γ'_{14}, respectively. For instance, the equations (4) and (5) generates the coefficients of simple slope and intercept for condition (i) when CSP = 0 and COP = 1 (i.e., X_1):

TABLE 1:
Results of the Regression Analysis

Predictor	Y_1 = Brand Advocacy			Y_2 = Brand Trust		
	b	t	Sig.	b	t	Sig.
Constant	2.23	3.13	0.00	3.06	3.19	0.00
X_1	0.32	2.11	0.04	0.37	2.23	0.03
X_2	-0.47	-3.80	0.00	-0.24	-2.22	0.02
X_3	0.84	9.68	0.00	0.76	6.58	0.00
X_1*X_2	0.25	2.36	0.02	0.23	2.22	0.02
X_1*X_3	0.34	2.43	0.02	0.15	1.02	0.54
X_2*X_3	-0.15	-1.17	0.24	-0.04	-0.23	0.82
$X_1*X_2*X_3$	0.30	2.97	0.01	0.23	2.21	0.03
	$F(7, 318) = 31.55$			$F(7, 318) = 12.98$		
	$p < .001$			$p < .001$		
	$R^2_{adj.} = .49$			$R^2_{adj.} = .37$		

TABLE 2a:
Results of the Simple Slope Analysis (Y_1 = Brand Advocacy)

Conditions	X_1 (0 = CSP, 1 = COP)			Conditions	X'_1 (0 = COP, 1 = CSP)		
	γ	t	Sig.		γ'	t	Sig.
γ_{11}: $X_{20}X_{30}$	0.64	3.91	0.00	γ'_{11}: $X_{20}X_{30}$	0.47	2.58	0.02
γ_{12}: $X_{20}X_{31}$	0.44	2.52	0.01	γ'_{12}: $X_{20}X_{31}$	0.59	3.73	0.00
γ_{13}: $X_{21}X_{30}$	-0.58	-3.68	0.00	γ'_{13}: $X_{21}X_{30}$	-0.41	-2.43	0.03
γ_{14}: $X_{21}X_{31}$	-0.45	-2.56	0.01	γ'_{14}: $X_{21}X_{31}$	-0.63	-3.34	0.00

TABLE 2b:
Results of the Simple Slope Analysis (Y_2 = Brand Trust)

Conditions	X_1 (0 = CSP, 1 = COP)			Conditions	X'_1 (0 = COP, 1 = CSP)		
	γ	t	Sig.		γ'	t	Sig.
γ_{11}: $X_{20}X_{30}$	0.18	1.55	0.32	γ'_{11}: $X_{20}X_{30}$	0.27	2.43	0.03
γ_{12}: $X_{20}X_{31}$	0.39	3.80	0.00	γ'_{12}: $X_{20}X_{31}$	0.20	1.94	0.17
γ_{13}: $X_{21}X_{30}$	-0.34	3.28	0.00	γ'_{13}: $X_{21}X_{30}$	-0.36	3.37	0.00
γ_{14}: $X_{21}X_{31}$	-0.35	-3.43	0.00	γ'_{14}: $X_{21}X_{31}$	-0.57	4.92	0.00

Intercept γ_{01} = b_0 + b_2X_{20} + b_3X_{30} + $b_6X_{20}X_{30}$ (4)
Simple slope γ_{11} = b_1 + b_4X_{20} + b_5X_{30} + $b_7X_{20}X_{30}$ (5)

Table 2a and 2b summarizes the eight coefficients of the simple slope analysis for each dependent variable.

Results

Brand Advocacy and the Moderating Effect of Product Involvement. Results from Table 1 suggest a significant three-way interaction among the type of information (COP vs. CSP), the valence of information (CSR vs. CSI) and product involvement (low vs. high) (b = 0.30, *p* = .01). The results of two-way interactions between the independent variable and moderators are also significant.

Further simple slope analyses were carried out and the results suggested that in the low product involvement circumstance, positive corporate social performance information (CSR-CSP) has a stronger effect on brand advocacy than corporate operating performance information (CSR-COP) (γ_{11} = 0.64 vs. γ'_{11} = 0.47, *p* < .01). Table 2a also indicates that the CSI-CSP has a

stronger negative impact (refer to the negative signs of the simple slope coefficients) on brand advocacy than CSI-COP for low involvement products (γ'_{13} = -0.58 vs. γ_{13} = -0.41, *p* < .01). H_{1a} and b are thus supported.

For high involvement products, positive COP and CSP presented opposite patterns to the situations of low involvement products. That is, CSR-COP has a stronger effect on brand advocacy than CSR-COP (γ'_{12} = 0.59 vs. γ_{12} = 0.44, *p* < .05). Table 2a also indicates that the CSI-COP has a stronger negative impact (refer to the negative signs of the simple slope coefficients) on brand advocacy than CSI-CSP for high involvement products (γ'_{14} = -0.63 vs. γ_{14} = -0.45, *p* < .01). H_{2a} and b are thus supported.

Brand Trust and the Moderating Effect of Product Involvement . Although Table 1 indicates the three-way interaction for the brand advocacy is significant (b = 0.23, *p* = .03), the results from simple slope analyses in Table 2b only present the conditional two-way interactions in the high, but not low product involvement situation (refer to γ_{11} and γ_{13} for X_1 and X'_1, respectively). H_3 is not supported. For high involvement products, CSR-COP has

a stronger effect on brand trust than CSR-COP ($\gamma_{12} = 0.39$ vs. $\gamma'_{12} = 0.20$, $p < .01$). Table 2a also indicates that the CSI-COP has a stronger negative impact (refer to the negative signs of the simple slope coefficients) on brand trust than CSI-CSP for high involvement products ($\gamma'_{14} = -0.57$ vs. $\gamma_{14} = -0.35$, $p < .01$). Thus, the results support H_{4a} and b.

Discussion

As the different roles of CSP and COP in the diagnosticity and judgment, such type of positive information consistently influence brand advocacy in the same direction. However, as the level of uncertainty and perceived risks are different between low and high involvement products, the nature of CSP and COP information seems to be a better predictor of brand trust for high than low involvement products. These findings are consistent with the conclusions from trust research literature in that trust is usually related to a combination of brand and product or service attributes, quality and reliability (Hess et al., 2003, Moorman et al., 1993; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999). Compared with low involvement products consumers probably weigh quality and reliability of products or services more important than other dimensions for high involvement products. Combining these judgments into a summary construct, brand trust, consumers use it as an indication of expected future performance.

Furthermore, the moderating effect of involvement on corporate social responsibility and customer-brand relationship found in this study is consistent with social judgment theory (Sherif & Hovland, 1961), which suggests that individual current attitude serves as the reference framework to categorize received information based on this framework. According to the social judgment theory, involvement moderates the effects on consumer attitude (Wang & Lee, 2005). In the current study, individuals were more likely to employ COP information for high involvement product while CSP had a strong interference effect on brand advocacy for low involvement product.

CONCLUSIONS

General Discussion

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a topic continues to receive increased attention from scholars and practitioners. Although much research has centered on building the construct of CSR, the argument on what CSR includes has never stopped. Building up prior research, this paper proposes two general classes of positive CSR as well as negative CSR, or corporate social irresponsibility (CSI) (Armstrong, 1977) that may affect customer-brand relationship: COP, the product or service performance-related corporate information; and CSP, the corporate social- and ethical-related information. Although marketing literature has focused primarily on CSI-COP, that is, the corporate publicity resulting from product failures or crisis (e.g., Dawar & Pillutla, 2000), WOM research has also contributed to the dimension of CSI-CSP (Mahajan et al., 1984). Together with purchase intention, brand advocacy is used as one of the dependent variables to examine the impacts of COP and CSP on word-of-mouth (WOM) and purchase intention in this study. The findings suggest that the COP-CSP and brand advocacy paradigm is moderated by the level of product involvement. Individuals have different WOM preferences in positive/negative CSP and COP information for low/high involvement products. These findings can further contribute to the everlasting WOM information valence research as well as the effectiveness of cause-related marketing in terms of the selection on non-profit organizational partners (Andrews, Luo, Fang, & Aspara, 2014) as well as the design of sponsorship activities (Robinson, Irmak, & Jayachandran, 2012).

Moreover, by extending the expectancy value theory that posits overall brand attitude through the formation of brand associations held in consumer's memories (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), these results add that for low involvement products (e.g., juice), consumers associate a company's CSP information as more diagnostic information compared with COP in brand evaluation and consequent advocacy behavior intentions because CSP is more valuable in terms of information than is COP. For high involvement products, conversely, COP is viewed more diagnostic and

valuable for brand association and thus leads to brand advocacy. These findings can also contribute to clarifying how consumers perceive and react to distinctive corporate social responsibility information and how firms can design communication strategies to utilize these effects.

Following the supportive findings from brand advocacy, the current study introduced an additional variable that companies can deploy to be influenced by processing COP and CSP information, brand trust. Trust is one of the factors that differentiate relationships from transactions (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2001; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002). Any personal relationship, whether interpersonal or between a person and a brand, is built on trust. However, the lack of empirical research on brand trust in corporate social responsibility could be explained by the fact that applying interpersonal relationship theories such as trust is not well-understood because the brand is an inanimate object. In a marketing context it is impossible to completely detach trust from the nature of its object. The empirical results for the current study shed some light on the moderating effect of product involvement in this CSR-trust consumer and brand relationship. Similar to brand advocacy, for high involvement products (e.g., TV sets), positive COP and negative CSP have stronger effects than their opponents on brand trust.

Managerial Implications

This research has several implications for contemporary marketing management. First, this paper provides information about which product categories would be more appropriate for utilizing different categories of corporate social responsibility practices from the consumer viewpoint. For instance, companies in low involvement product categories may focus on promoting CSP information among early adopters, while firms in high involvement product categories can focus on disseminating positive COP information. Thus, buzz marketing would be a good option for the company marketing a publicly visible product. Complementing previous research on the effects of "fit" under various marketing contexts (e.g., brand extension, event

sponsorship), this research shows how "fit" can also be relevant for COP/CSR and product categories.

Second, results from this study are from the adoption of a fictitious brand name. This design may lend new firms the ideas of developing appropriate cause-related marketing strategies. Consumers are highly responsive to companies that support causes they view as worthy. According to these research outcomes, companies in different product categories should make cause-related marketing a powerful tool to break through advertising clutter, generate publicity, and foster consumer preference for both the promoted brand and associated brands (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Andrews et al., 2014). With the knowledge of COP/CSP and brand advocacy introduced in this paper, companies can make cause-related marketing to improve consumer's perceptions of sponsoring organizations, create a point of difference from competing brand, and subsequently increase purchase intentions (Andrews et al., 2014).

Finally, building customer advocacy is now one response to the vulnerabilities of brands and branding in the face of rising consumer empowerment. According to the brand advocacy results from this study, advocates for a company's cause-related marketing efforts can be interwoven through interpersonal connections. Corporate social responsibility creates new opportunities for brand-customer dialogue, knowledge creation, and, critically, provides a new context in which the interests of a corporation and those of its customers can be more closely aligned. Although most customers may now possess greater knowledge about products, some are more interested, motivated, and prepared to engage in corporate social responsibility related to brands and their social value of the products than others. Especially given the competitive situation in the business world, the powerful electronic WOM in the online community would be an effective means of communicating such corporate support of social issues with the public.

Limitation and Future Research

The limitations of this study provide some guidance for further research. First, the present

study explored the intention toward target brand, not the actual purchase behavior of CSR-tied products. Although there is a relationship between attitude and behavior, individuals do not always live up to their attitudes. Therefore, it would be worthwhile to examine the predictive impact of psychographics on purchase behavior in the future.

A second limitation of this study is the relatively small sample size. This is a concern both in terms of external validity and statistical power. It is difficult to generalize results from an experiment employing a small student sample to a larger, more representative population. Thus, the robustness of the results from this study needs to be tested in future studies conducted with a larger, more representative sample. A related issue is in the present study where COP and CSP directly and via product involvement and the valence of information indirectly explained 49 percent of the variance in brand advocacy and 37 percent of the variance in brand trust. Thus, there are other determinants between corporate social responsibility and customer-brand relationship that could be included in more comprehensive models with possibly higher explanatory power. For instance, other customer characteristics, such as customer experience, may influence brand trust (and brand advocacy) (Bennett, Härtel, & McColl-Kennedy, 2005). Beyond that, brand characteristics such as brand reputation and social drivers such as social group influence and peers' recommendation have been identified to different types of brand advocacy and brand trust (Gounaris & Stathakopoulos, 2004). Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) found that hedonic value and utilitarian value as different product-category characteristics influence brand trust and brand advocacy differently. The assumption that trust might be more important when products are characterized primarily by experience (e.g., hedonic products or services) should be explored in future research.

Third, this experiment used a fictitious brand that was purported to strengthen the internal validity of the experimental design, but nonetheless poses threats to external validity (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). An alternative experimental design could address this limitation by using existing brands and/or

corporate social responsibility. Research participants' prior knowledge about the brands and/or social causes could then be statistically controlled. It is important to note, however, that this alternative design is not without limitations; it somehow sacrifices internal validity for the sake of achieving external validity. A more thorough consideration of including consumer experience, brand characteristics, product category in the experimental design may also add more insights of the valence effects that present in the current study.

Finally, corporate investments and cause-related marketing in recent years have been considerable and are still on the rise (e.g., Andrews et al., 2014; Robinson et al., 2012). The increasing popularity of cause-related marketing calls for systematic research that could potentially provide managerial guidance for corporate decision marketers as well as non-profit organization leaders. On the other hand, the phenomenon of cause-related marketing offers new marketing concepts and poses thought-provoking research questions; in and of itself, it is a fascinating topic.

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APPENDIX:

Study Stimuli: low involvement product category

CSR-COP, CSR- CSP
[*Company ABC*] is a company producing fruit juices. It is good at technological innovativeness, and thus able to provide a wide range of juice products to meet customers' dynamic needs and tastes. Moreover, [*Company ABC*] often encourages its employees to participate in volunteer activities in local schools, hospitals, and parks. [*Company ABC*] has also tried to help regional governments in improving the quality of the natural environment.

CSI-COP, CSI- CSP
[*Company ABC*] is a company producing fruit juices. Some retailers complained about not receiving [*Company ABC*]'s products on time thus impacting their business. Moreover, there have been a few reports of food poisoning from drinking their products. Recently [*Company ABC*] has been accused of neither paying taxes on time nor paying much attention to protecting the quality of the natural environment during the farming process in some regions.

CSI-COP, CSR- CSP
[*Company ABC*] is a company producing fruit juices. Some retailers complained about not receiving [*Company ABC*]'s products on time thus impacting their business. There have also been a few reports of food poisoning from drinking their products. However, [*Company ABC*] often encourages its employees to participate in volunteer activities in local schools, hospitals, and parks. It has also tried to help regional governments in improving the quality of the natural environment.

CSR-COP, CSI- CSP
[*Company ABC*] is a company producing fruit juices. It is good at technological innovativeness, and thus able to provide a wide range of juice products to meet customers' dynamic needs and tastes. However, [*Company ABC*] has recently been accused of neither paying taxes on time nor paying much attention to protecting the quality of the natural environment during the farming process in some regions.

Study Stimuli: high involvement product category

CSR-COP, CSR- CSP
[*Company ABC*] is a company manufacturing TV sets. It is good at technological innovativeness, and thus able to provide a wide range of TV sets to meet customers' dynamic needs and tastes. Moreover, [*Company ABC*] often encourages its employees to participate in volunteer activities in local schools, hospitals, and parks. [*Company ABC*] has also tried to help regional governments in improving the quality of the natural environment.

CSI-COP, CSI- CSP
[*Company ABC*] is a company manufacturing TV sets. Some retailers recently complained about not receiving [*Company ABC*]'s products on time thus impacting their business. Moreover, there have been a few reports of screen explosion accidents when using their products. Recently [*Company ABC*] has been accused of neither paying taxes on time nor paying much attention to protecting the quality of the natural environment during the process of production in some regions.

CSI-COP, CSR- CSP

[*Company ABC*] is a company manufacturing TV sets. Some retailers recently complained about not receiving [*Company ABC*]'s products on time thus impacting their business. Moreover, there have been a few reports of screen explosion accidents when using their products. However, [*Company ABC*] often encourages its employees to participate in volunteer activities in local schools, hospitals, and parks. It has also tried to help regional governments in improving the quality of the natural environment.

CSR-COP, CSI- CSP

[*Company ABC*] is a company manufacturing TV sets. It is good at technological innovativeness, and thus able to provide a wide range of TV sets to meet customers' dynamic needs and tastes. However, [*Company ABC*] has recently been accused of neither paying taxes on time nor paying much attention to protecting the quality of the natural environment during the process of production in some regions.