

Investigating the impact of environmental corporate social responsibility initiatives on consumer behavior and purchase intention: the mediating role of how tightly linked environmental corporate social responsibility initiatives are to products

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Abstract

Environmental corporate social responsibility initiatives (E-CSR) have gained increased significance amongst corporations as a means to strengthen social impact and influence consumer perception or behavior. Existing academic literature suggests that the level of fit between a company and the corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiative they undertake is a key moderator to the impact that CSR initiatives have on consumer perception and behavior. While certain research substantiates the claim that higher linkage of CSR initiatives to products positively influence consumer perceptions, others have opposed this ideology. Findings have shown that the impact of CSR linkage as a moderator to the impact CSR has on consumer behavior is contextually defined. Thus, this study distinguishes itself from existing literature by specifically examining how the linkage of E-CSR initiatives to the product that a corporation provides is a moderator to the impact that E-CSR has on purchase intention and consumer perceptions. The qualitative and quantitative studies conducted demonstrates that companies with products that are tightly linked (integrated) to the E-CSR initiative increase consumer purchase intention and positive perceptions more than companies with products that are unrelated (peripheral) or somewhat linked (partially-integrated) to the E-CSR initiative. Findings have shown that the impact of peripheral and partially integrated E-CSR initiatives on consumer behavior are comparable. The presence of an E-CSR initiative, regardless of its level of fit, were shown to increase positive consumer perceptions and willingness to pay as compared to an absence of any E-CSR initiative. Finally, demographic factors such as consumers' environmental values and income were observed to impact the strength of the relationships.

Keywords

environmental corporate social responsibility, purchase intention, company-cause fit, consumer response to environmental initiatives, product-cause fit, consumer behavior

Introduction

Environmental degradation has gained particular concern among consumers in recent years due to the increased prevalence of climate-change-induced catastrophes, biodiversity loss, and heavily polluted cities. Given that consumer purchasing decisions are a key driver of companies' strategies and practices, this research seeks to assess the impact of organizations' environmental corporate social responsibility initiatives (E-CSR) on consumer behavior, purchase intention and brand attitude. Companies often partake in CSR initiatives to demonstrate their social and environmental responsibility and contribution to broader societal-concerns through philanthropy, activism, or ethically motivated practices. There is a consensus amongst academics that CSR serves as a unique selling point that distinguishes such corporations in the market place whilst increasing brand awareness and perception (Fombrun and Shanley 1990).

Existing academic literature suggests a positive correlation between corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives

and consumers' likelihood to purchase products, however, findings have shown that the willingness to pay for specific social features is contextually defined (Marquina and Morales 2012). 'Contextually defined' suggests that the specific product, industry, company, and type of CSR initiative are moderators to the impact that these CSR initiatives have on consumer behavior and purchase intention.

The significant moderating role that these 'contexts' hold has led to inconsistent conclusions on the impact that CSR initiatives have on consumer perceptions and purchase intention. Xueming Luo delineates that for firms that are less innovative, CSR reduces consumer satisfaction of products (Luo and Bhattacharya 2006). Xiaoli Nan alternatively deduced that cause-related marketing

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(CRM) efforts that highlight CSR initiatives evoked positive consumer attitudes, particularly with the CRM message was linked to the brand values (Nan and Heo 2007). Simultaneously, Tillmann Wagner articulated that if consumers perceive a firm to be hypocritical then CSR initiatives would negatively impact consumer attitudes (Wagner et al. 2009). Yeosun Yoon similarly concludes that “CSR activities improve a company’s image when consumers attribute sincere motives, are ineffective when sincerity of motives is ambiguous, and hurt the company’s image when motives are perceived as insincere” (Yoon et al. 2006).

Evidently, the specific contextual environment of the CSR initiative and characteristics of the corporation dictate how CSR impacts consumer behavior. Prevailing literature suggests that the level of fit between a company and the CSR initiative they undertake is one of these notable moderators that impact how CSR initiatives affect consumer perception and behavior (Zasuwa 2017). The level of fit or linkage between CSR initiatives and the company or product is thus one of the key determinants that influence the ‘contextually defined environment’ in which we can investigate. The fit or linkage between the CSR initiative and company refers to how relevant the social responsibility initiative is to the characteristics of the company or product. Dongho Yoo summarizes this relationship by elucidating that “higher CSR fit shows a stronger association between the company and CSR activities, and the positive aspects of the activities are more easily transferred to the company” (Yoo and Lee 2018).

Current studies have uncovered nuances on the moderating impact that the level of fit of CSR has on influencing consumer behavior. Grzegorz Zasuwa’s meta-analysis of 51 experimental studies revealed that a corporation with a high-fit CSR initiative that also has a positive reputation will increase consumer perceptions most positively, whereas monetary donations are substantially less impactful in this domain (Zasuwa 2017). Karen L. Becker-Olsen substantiates that low-fit CSR initiatives decrease consumer attitudes whilst adding that corporations that are seemingly profit-driven negatively impacts perceptions, regardless of how integrated or fit the CSR initiatives are to the products being sold. In this study, it was the “high-fit, proactive initiatives” that most positively improved consumer attitudes (Becker-Olsen et al. 2006).

While certain academics - such as the aforementioned - demonstrate that higher linkage of CSR initiatives to products positively influence consumer perceptions, others have opposed this ideology. Minette Drumwright’s analysis of “company advertising with a social dimension” found that companies that promoted integrated (or highly-linked) CSR initiatives evoked consumer skepticism; consumers viewed that such corporations were ill motivated and exploitative (Drumwright 1996). Dongho Yoo’s multiple regression analysis inferred that when consumers do not personally resonate with the cause of the CSR initiative a company undertakes, a high level of CSR-to-product-fit as well as consistency of CSR initiatives within the firm needs to be present for consumers to hold positive brand perceptions (Yoo and Lee 2018).

Despite the debated conclusions on the impact that the level of fit or linkage of CSR initiatives to products have

on consumer behavior, it is evident that this is a subject matter worthy of further investigation. Understanding the impact that the level of fit has on this relationship can guide corporations to effectual implementation of CSR initiatives that both impacts business results and maximizes social impact. This will highlight how corporations may succeed by increasing environmental initiatives, or alternatively, how we must rely on government policies to negate the negative externalities.

It is evident from existing literature that the impact of CSR initiatives on consumer behavior is significantly mediated by CSR-to-corporation linkage, fit, or congruence. This paper distinguishes itself from existing literature by narrowing into an investigation of E-CSR rather than CSR at large. Further, there is a focus on the E-CSR linkage or fit with the specific product being sold rather than fit to the corporation at large. The majority of previous literature in this topic focused on consumers’ cognitive processes, whereas this investigation specifically investigates the impact on purchase intention and consumer perceptions. To add additional insights, the paper may highlight any moderating impact of demographic factors to the results of the study, such as how environmental values or political orientation influences this relationship.

It is hypothesized that companies with products that are tightly linked (integrated) to the E-CSR initiative will increase consumer purchase intention and positive perceptions more than companies with products that seem unrelated (peripheral) to the E-CSR initiative.

Study 1: Qualitative Investigation

Methodology

The objective of study 1 was to conduct a qualitative investigation into consumers’ thought processes and perceptions when purchasing a product that incorporates a E-CSR initiative. The study was comprised of several open-ended questions where participants were asked to describe their consumer thought processes. Participants were initially prompted to describe their environmental values and how these may or may not be integrated into their everyday behavior and actions. Subsequently, participants were presented with 3 different scenarios of companies changing their business practices by implementing an E-CSR initiative. Each scenario carried a different level of linkage or fit to the product and participants were asked to explain their thoughts on the company, its motivates and the E-CSR initiative.

The first scenario presented participants with a sneaker company that has partnered with a non-profit organization to collect plastic waste on beaches and coastal communities before it makes its way to the ocean. The sneaker company processes this plastic waste (shredding it into polyester yarn) and uses this to create sneakers entirely made from the waste, representing a fully-integrated E-CSR initiative.

The second scenario asked participants to suppose that a multinational conglomerate corporation that produces various brands of beauty products, toiletries and detergent relies heavily on raw materials of sugar, palm oil, soy cocoa, and paper. Participants are explained how the extraction of such resources is often deemed unsustainable but that the corporation has begun donating money to an organization that will protect and regenerate over a million

hectares of land, forests, and oceans by 2030. This scenario represents a partially integrated E-CSR initiative because the organization is donating to a cause linked directly to the harm it makes but is not making integrated changes to their product or production process.

The third scenario provides participants with the context of an online customer support services company that uses non-renewable energy to run their offices and data centers. They are told that the company has begun to donate a portion of its profits to a charity that helps with local beach clean ups and increasing access to clean water for underprivileged communities. This scenario represents a peripheral E-CSR initiative because the corporation is donating to a cause with low fit or linkage to the environmental harm that they cause and are not making integrated changes to their operations.

50 participants participated in return for a \$15 Amazon gift card (74% Male, 26% Female). 25 participants were recruited from environmentally based Reddit groups, and 25 participants were recruited from general, 'every-day' Reddit groups, which will allow an analysis of any discrepancies amongst the two segments.

Results & Discussion

When reflecting on environmental values, the 'every-day' segment of the participants often used language such as "I try my best to" or "attempt to" when reflecting on their engagement with environmental values or actions. While there was variance in the level of environmentalism shown amongst this segment, the vast majority indicated that they would not inconvenience themselves or significantly adjust their habits to adhere to environmental values. It was a common theme that integrating environmental values into their lifestyle would solely be motivated by a desire to do the right thing, contribute to society, or feel an attachment to their community. There was minimal rationale inherently linked to environmental concerns, such as preventing the loss of biodiversity or mitigating climate change.

Conversely, the environmental segment clearly articulated core environmental values, such as recycling, veganism, waste reduction, composting, biodiversity conservation, and several others. These translated into moderate to significant lifestyle changes; participants demonstrated an inclination to recycle, limit or completely stop consumption of meat or seafood, lower waste on an individual level, use public transport and participate in environmental advocacy or volunteerism, amongst other sustainable habits. It was clear that this segment was educated on the intricacies of environmental preservation through the vocabulary employed and explanation of environmental processes such as rainwater recycling systems, garbage classification, or waste battery treatment centers.

The aforementioned environmental values provide context to the participant's reactions to the following scenarios. In the fully integrated E-CSR sneaker example, participants from both the everyday and environmental segment often reflected a mild to strong positive association of the brand and its values. Common themes were that the company was for the people and kindhearted. The consensus amongst the everyday group (and a minority of the environmental group) was that the fully-integrated E-CSR initiative was merely the "icing on top" and that factors of quality,

cost, aesthetics, comfort and performance would take precedence. The environmental segment appeared to have more mixed responses. Many within this segment viewed the environmental initiative as a significant value-added rather than merely being the "icing on top", however, others were skeptical that the company was inauthentic as this sneaker would only represent a minority of their total sneaker production. Still, the initiative increased purchase intention for most participants from both segments. Interestingly, for the everyday segment, there was an increase in consumer perception of quality, functionality, and durability not only of the recycled-plastic-sneaker in question, but of all sneakers the corporation would sell. The environmental segment observed a very slight increase in the perception of quality, functionality and durability of the plastic sneaker with little to no impact on their perception of the firm's other sneakers.

Over half of respondents indicated that the fully-integrated E-CSR initiative was motivated by the corporation seeking publicity. Many respondents, particularly those in the environmental segment, indicated an inclination to investigate the company's track record of treating employees, their environmental footprint and practices, and other corporate initiatives. Some also indicated that they would need to understand corporate partnerships, celebrity endorsements and brand associations to see consistency of environmental values in order to characterize these initiatives as authentic. The minority of respondents (particularly in the environmental segment) conveyed a cynical approach by citing the prevalence of 'greenwashing' and the opinion that most corporations are not to be trusted. Interestingly, certain participants who expressed admiration for the company's initiative asserted that publicity is an inherent objective of organizations. This poses a question on whether it is fair for E-CSR initiatives to be driven by an objective to gain publicity if the initiative is impactful.

Amongst presenting the every-day and environmental segment with the partially-integrated E-CSR initiative, consumer perceptions appeared more negative and evoked skepticism. Participants viewed the firm's sizable donation to afforestation efforts (directly linked to the company's environmental harm of deforestation) as a means to "right their wrongs." the notion of greenwashing, "ticking the ESG box" or seeking tax exemptions was commonly referred to. The environmental group, in particular, explicitly mentioned that they "should come up with alternative methods to make their products", implicitly declaring a preference for a fully-integrated E-CSR initiative. Still, there were a sizable portion of participants in both segments who acknowledged that it is an appropriate and effective initiative. Certain participants in the environmental segment provided the caveat that they must regenerate the ecosystems that they are responsible for destroying, and that the impact of the donation should be greater than the harm they are causing.

All participants – who appeared to be educated on the intricacies of deforestation and biodiversity loss – reported either no impact on purchase intention or a decrease in willingness to purchase. Various participants in the environmental segment noted they would only purchase if the products were a necessity and would avoid palm oil in particular. It is worth nothing that the participants' level of education, support, or affinity with environmental

causes seemingly influenced their judgement and perception of the initiative and company, which is another moderator to consider given the fundamental differences of the 3 scenarios. Many respondents explicitly or implicitly conveyed an expectation that corporations are to protect and regenerate what they have used; this E-CSR initiative was not viewed as an added-value, but rather the absence of it would have seemingly led to a more harmful impact on purchase decision and brand perceptions. As such, the quantitative study will add the condition of a corporation having no E-CSR initiative to better understand this relationship.

Across the board, participants' perception of the functionality or durability of the conglomerate's beauty products, toiletries and detergent remain unchanged with the partially-integrated E-CSR initiative; the everyday segment had a slight increase in their perceptions whereas the environmental group had a slight decrease in their perceptions. Still, the majority of participants viewed the initiative as inauthentic, citing the notion that individuals would not support deforestation regardless of the donation and that they would need to further investigate the corporation's track record. Many participants made the distinction between creating a grand plan versus providing proof of implementation; there was a sense of skepticism over companies setting ambitious targets ("by 2023 we will. . ."), and a clear preference for evidence of existing or past action and implementation.

In the peripheral E-CSR initiative example, participants from both segments demonstrated mixed responses. Around half of respondents noted that the initiative was inauthentic or were indifferent about it, providing a rationale that the donation was unrelated to the service being offered. The other half of participants indicated a positive reaction to the initiative, but it is noteworthy that participants were evaluating the initiative in the context of the harm that the corporation was making. Respondents noted that the vast majority of corporations run on unsustainable energy and thus it would be harsh to punish this company for their operational model. This provides the insight that consumers evaluate environmental damage of companies in the context of the industry or other companies' environmental footprint and processes. The environmental segment appeared more skeptical of the initiative, demanding more data and insight into the impact and harm that was being made. There was a repeated preference amongst both segments for the corporation to lay out what they have actioned and implemented rather than setting these ambitious, but skeptical, targets on what they will do. Nevertheless, around half of the 'every day' segment demonstrated an appreciation for this initiative because it engaged with underprivileged communities; the 'everyday' segment admired the benefit to human communities over the environmental benefit of tackling water scarcity. The environmental segment reported mixed purchase intentions – some participants indicated that they were indifferent about the initiative, some indicated they would not purchase from this service, and others reported they would choose this service over its competitors if it was a necessity. Still, both segments reported that the initiative increased their perception of the service quality and functionality, but this increase was greater amongst the everyday segment. Interestingly, the positive perceptions of

the peripheral-CSR initiative was greater than the partially-integrated E-CSR initiative. Again, it appears as though the participant's personal support for the environmental cause effects their perception of the initiative and thus brand perception or purchase intention.

Study 2: Quantitative Investigation

Methodology

The quantitative study was informed by the insights gleaned within the qualitative study. The purpose of the study is to make broader quantitative conclusions on the moderating role of linkage of E-CSR initiatives to the relationship of how E-CSR impacts consumer behavior. In this study, 818 participants participated in return for monetary compensation (49.7% Male, 47.6% Female, Mean Age = 28 Years). The study contained several closed-ended questions for consumers to convey their perception of E-CSR initiatives, their environmental values, and demographic characteristics. Specifically, participants are asked to report on their likelihood to purchase, perception of authenticity, effectiveness of E-CSR, willingness to pay, and net promoter score.

All participants were provided with the same scenarios as a controlled variable but were randomly assigned to one of four conditions for each scenario. Each condition represented a different E-CSR initiative with varying levels of linkage or fit to the product. The environmental harm caused by the company within the first scenario is greater than that of the second scenario, which may allow for an assessment of how the severity of environmental damage caused by a company impacts the observed results.

Scenario 1: participants were told to imagine a company that produces sneakers from plastics that are petroleum-derived, are 75% non-biodegradable, and often pile up in landfills after 4-5 years. In the first condition, participants are provided with additional information of a fully-integrated E-CSR initiative. Respondents were asked to suppose that the company introduces a new line of sneakers that are entirely recycled from plastic waste. In the second condition, participants are told that that this company has begun donating a portion of its profits to a charity that organizes ocean clean-ups to collect plastic waste. This represents a partially integrated E-CSR initiative as the company is donating to a cause linked directly to the harm they make, but there are no integrated changes to the production or product. In the third condition, respondents are asked to suppose that this company has begun to donate a portion of its profits to a non-profit organization that works on habitat preservation and conservation efforts of endangered species globally. This represents a peripheral E-CSR initiative as the organization is donating to a charity unrelated to the harm that they make. In the fourth condition, respondents are provided with no additional information and are asked to assess the company without any E-CSR initiative.

Scenario 2: participants were asked to suppose that a corporation that produces toiletries uses sugar, palm oil and soy cocoa as key ingredients for their products. They are explained that the extraction of these resources is deemed unsustainable because of their intensive farming practices and use of chemical pesticides that leads to soil

erosion and contamination. In the first condition of a fully-integrated E-CSR initiative, participants are told that the company introduces a new line of toiletries with zero-waste packaging and that key ingredients are sourced from organic, environmentally-friendly, and cruelty-free alternatives. In the second condition of a partially-integrated E-CSR initiative, participants are asked to imagine that the company donates a portion of its profits to an organization that tackles food insecurity by preserving the long-term productivity of soil and empowering farmers to have sustainable agricultural practices. In the third condition of a peripheral E-CSR initiative, respondents are told to suppose that the company has begun to donate a portion of its profits to a charity that helps with local beach clean-ups and increasing access to clean water for underprivileged communities. Finally, in the fourth condition, respondents are provided with no additional information and are asked to assess the company without any E-CSR initiative.

Results & Discussion

Table 1 displays a summary of results from scenario one, indicating the mean and standard deviation of results. Participants were asked multiple questions pertaining to how the E-CSR initiative impacts their willingness to pay and perceptions. Overall, the trend observed corresponds to the hypothesized trend that companies with products that are tightly linked (integrated) to the E-CSR initiative will increase consumer purchase intention and positive perceptions more than companies with products that seem unrelated (peripheral) to the E-CSR initiative. It is worth noting that there are very minimal differences within perception and willingness to pay between the partially integrated E-CSR initiative and the peripheral E-CSR initiative. For instance, the mean likelihood of participants purchasing sneakers on a scale of 1 to 7 for the partially integrated E-CSR initiative was 5.93 compared to 5.82 for the peripheral E-CSR initiative. Interestingly, despite the fact that the peripheral E-CSR initiative involved a donation completely unrelated to the corporation or product, consumers viewed the authenticity of this initiative to be identical to the partially integrated E-CSR initiative. This perhaps implies that regardless of the environmental cause that a firm donates to, the impact on consumer's perception of authenticity, effectiveness, and willingness to pay is congruous. As expected, there is a notable difference between conditions 1-3 and condition 4, implying that the presence of any E-CSR initiative indeed increases likelihood to purchase and consumer perceptions. While consumers were willing to pay significantly less for a product with an absence of an E-CSR initiative (Mean of -20.63%), the reported likelihood to purchase sneakers from the company did not have as large of a discrepancy (Mean of 5.25 for condition 4 compared to Mean of 5.82 for condition 3).

Table 2 displays a summary of results from scenario two. Participants were provided the context of a corporation with a more moderate level of environmental harm compared to scenario one. Respondents were randomized to one of the four conditions but were provided with a different condition to what they had received in scenario one. The trend observed adheres to the trends deduced in table 1 and the initial hypothesis. Notably, the fully integrated E-CSR

initiative appeared more effective in increasing consumer perception of authenticity and the initiative's effectiveness, especially in comparison to conditions 2 and 3. Unlike scenario 1, there was a more sizable discrepancy between likelihood to purchase and perception between the peripheral E-CSR initiative (condition 3) and the partially integrated E-CSR initiative (condition 2). This perhaps implies that consumers are reflecting the tightness of the linkage in the donation of the partially-integrated E-CSR initiative as more effective and authentic. As observed within the first scenario, condition 4 of no E-CSR initiative had a substantially lower likelihood to purchase and perception of effectiveness as expected. While the standard deviations of the willingness to pay for the toiletries are high, the mean results of the conditions within both tables adheres to the hypothesis formulated; there is the highest increase in willingness to pay for condition 1 and the highest decrease in willingness to pay for condition 4.

Table 1. Summary of Results from Quantitative Study Scenario 1

Question	Condition 1: Fully Integrated E-CSR Initiative	Condition 2: Partially Integrated E-CSR Initiative	Condition 3: Peripheral E-CSR Initiative	Condition 4: No E-CSR Initiative
Likelihood to purchase sneaker from this company on a scale of 1-7	6.89 (1.78)	5.93 (2.02)	5.82 (1.75)	5.25 (2.05)
Consumer perception of the company's authenticity in conducting this initiative on a scale of 1-7	6.36 (2.03)	4.84 (2.23)	4.85 (2.19)	N/A
Consumer perception of the company's effectiveness in solving the environmental damage that they presume the firm makes on a scale of 1-7	6.24 (2.04)	4.34 (2.38)	4.31 (2.30)	3.35 (2.18)
Willingness to pay for the sneakers from 50% less than before to 50% more than before	5.93% (18.76%)	-10.55% (23.28%)	-10.93% (22.53%)	-20.63% (19.82%)

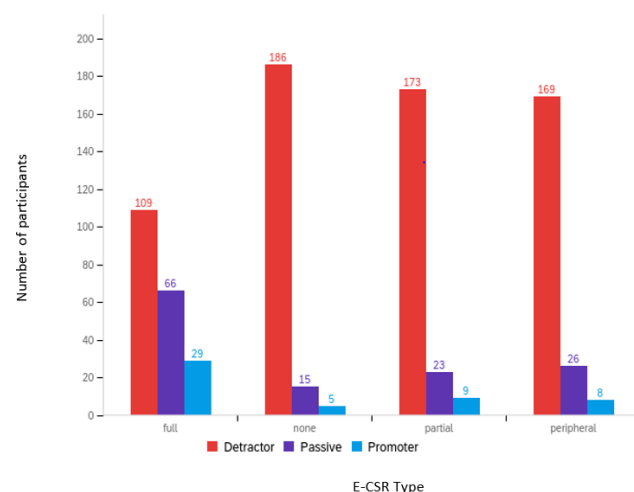
Note: Mean scores are presented within the table. Standard deviations are shown in parentheses.

Table 2. Summary of Results from Quantitative Study Scenario 2

Question	Condition 1: Fully Integrated E-CSR Initiative	Condition 2: Partially Integrated E-CSR Initiative	Condition 3: Peripheral E-CSR Initiative	Condition 4: No E-CSR Initiative
Likelihood to purchase toiletries (Scale of 1-7)	5.58 (1.36)	5.26 (2.14)	4.97 (1.99)	4.56 (2.07)
Consumer perception of the company's authenticity in conducting this initiative on a scale of 1-7	6.54 (1.94)	4.57 (2.24)	4.29 (2.09)	N/A
Consumer perception of the company's effectiveness in solving the environmental damage that they presume the firm makes on a scale of 1-7	6.57 (1.93)	4.13 (2.17)	3.83 (2.20)	3.26 (2.08)
Willingness to pay for the sneakers from 50% less than before to 50% more than before	9.74% (16.92)	-15.18% (24.16)	-16.29% (22.89)	-23.31% (19.10)

Note: Mean scores are presented within the table. Standard deviations are shown in parentheses.

Figures 1 and 2 display the net promoter score for scenarios 1 and 2. Based on the information provided, participants were asked to report their likelihood to recommend the product or company to friends or family on a scale of 1 to 10. The vast majority of respondents were detractors in both scenarios; the emphasis on the environmental harm that the corporations were making seemingly impacted consumers' willingness to advocate for the brand or company. As expected, the trend follows that the fully-integrated E-CSR initiative had the highest count of 'passive' or 'promoters.' There was no distinguishable difference in the number of 'passive' or 'promoter' scores within the conditions of none, partially integrated, and peripheral E-CSR within both scenarios.

**Figure 1. Net Promoter Score for Scenario 1**

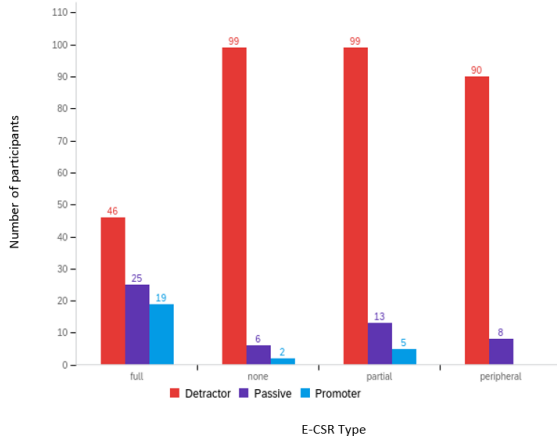


Figure 2. Net Promoter Score for Scenario 2

Figures 3, 4 and 5 provide a visual depiction of the relationship between various variables and questions for scenario 2. The trends observed in the figures are highly comparable to that of scenario 1. Each participant was categorized as a certain type of environmentalist in accordance with their responses to 8 questions assessing the candidates views of their environmental values, such as “I consider the potential environmental impact of my actions when making many of my decisions”. Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed with 8 environmental values on a scale of 1 to 7. If the mean of their responses was between 0-3, they were categorized as a “weak” environmentalist, if the mean of their response was between 3-5, they were categorized as an “intermediate environmentalist” and if their mean score was above 5, they were categorized as a strong environmentalist.

Interestingly, as observed in figure 3, the intermediate environmentalist appeared to perceive the E-CSR initiatives as most authentic for the full, partial, and peripheral conditions. This implies that the strong environmentalists were more skeptical of the authenticity of their initiatives in comparison. The weak environmentalists appeared to view the initiatives as least authentic in all conditions. It is noteworthy that the authenticity score was reported on a scale of 1 to 7, but the mean was impacted as participants who were displayed with the condition of “none” did not answer this question, which was calculated as a score of 0. Nevertheless, the relative trend of the mean scores is still upheld, and it is observed that the full initiatives appeared to be most authentic, followed by the partially integrated E-CSR initiatives and finally the peripheral E-CSR initiatives.

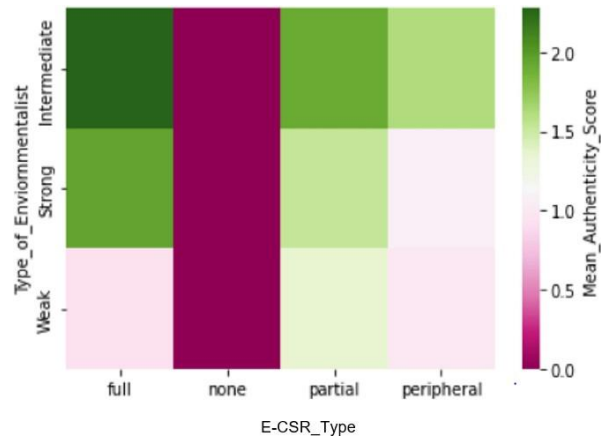


Figure 3. Heat Map displaying relationship between Authenticity Score and Type of consumer Environmentalist for the varying levels of E-CSR fit for scenario 2

Figure 4 displays that the strong environmentalist segment had a significant increase in willingness to pay for the fully integrated E-CSR initiative on average. However, the strong environmentalist’s segment was evidently more condemnatory of the partial and peripheral E-CSR initiatives that had a lower linkage to the product being sold. As expected, the strong and intermediate environmentalists had a significant decrease in willingness to pay when no E-CSR initiative was implemented. This highlights the importance of a presence of E-CSR, regardless of the level of fit or linkage. The intermediate environmentalists followed a similar trend to that of the strong environmentalists but the extent to which their willingness to pay increased or decreased was less. Finally, the weak environmentalist seemingly did not prioritize the presence of E-CSR initiatives or the level of its fit when assessing their willingness to pay; there was, intriguingly, an increase in the mean willingness to pay when no E-CSR initiative was present.

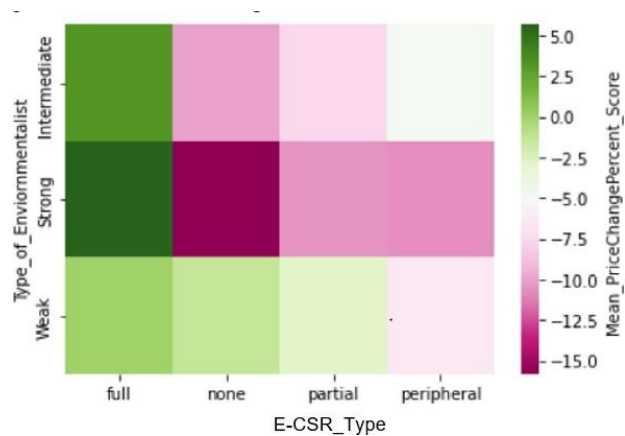


Figure 4. Heat Map displaying relationship between mean percentage change in willingness to pay from -50% to 50% and Type of Consumer Environmentalist for the varying levels of E-CSR fit for Scenario 2

The heat map in Figure 5 visually depicts that consumers who were displayed with the fully- integrated E-CSR initiative found that the initiative was most effective in solving and mitigating the environmental damage that the firm makes. As expected, consumers observed that the absence of an E-CSR initiative was highly ineffective in solving the environmental damage made. A sizable portion of respondents that were displayed with the partially integrated and peripheral E-CSR initiative also viewed the initiative as ineffective in solving the environmental damage, representing a comparable trend to the condition with no E-CSR initiative at all. This parallels the observations made in the qualitative study wherein consumers viewed donations as way for corporations to conceal their damage or ‘tick the CSR box.’

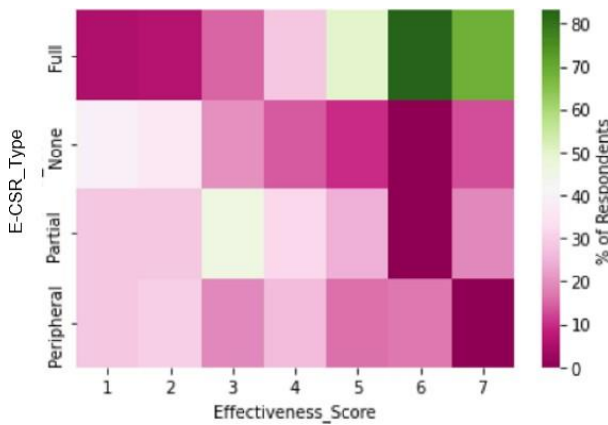


Figure 5. Heat Map displaying consumer perception of the effectiveness of E-CSR initiative in solving the environmental damage that consumers presume the firm in scenario 2 makes

Tables 3, 4 and 5 shows the moderating impact that political view, annual household income and education level impact likelihood to purchase, perception of E-CSR effectiveness, and perception of authenticity, respectively. The tables indicate the percentage of total respondents that answered each question on a scale of 1 to 7 segmented by the different demographic factors. Each column adds to a total of 100%. In table 3, we can observe that one’s political view did not necessarily impact their likelihood to purchase as significantly; there was a relatively equal dispersion of results regardless of political orientation. It is important to note that the condition of E-CSR initiative shown to the participants would likely have influenced this relationship. In table 4, it can generally be deduced that those with a higher income than \$100,000 perceived the initial to be more effective than those in lower income segments. Finally, table 5 highlights how those with a bachelors degree tended to view initiatives as more authentic compared to those with other levels of education who had a greater dispersion in results.

Table 3. Impact of Political Views on Likelihood to Purchase Sneakers in Scenario 1

Political Orientation	On a scale of 1-7, how likely are you to purchase a sneaker from this company?							
	Total	1: Very unlikely	2	3	4	5	6	7: Very likely
Very conservative	1.8%	0.0%	2.5%	2.3%	0.5%	1.0%	4.1%	4.5%
Slightly conservative	8.6%	7.7%	7.5%	4.7%	7.5%	12.9%	10.3%	6.0%
Neutral	32.4%	24.6%	30.0%	30.2%	35.5%	34.0%	28.9%	38.8%
Liberal	28.5%	26.2%	28.8%	29.5%	29.0%	26.3%	36.1%	22.4%
Very liberal	23.6%	36.9%	26.3%	27.9%	19.9%	20.6%	17.5%	26.9%
Prefer not to answer	4.2%	4.6%	3.8%	4.7%	5.9%	4.6%	1.0%	1.5%

Table 4. Impact of Annual Household Income on Perception of the Effectiveness of Initiative in Scenario 2

	How effective do you think this company is in solving the environmental damage that you presume this firm makes?							
	Total	1: Very Ineffective	2	3	4	5	6	7: Very effective
Less than \$25,000	40.8%	45.5%	34.3%	40.7%	52.0%	42.0%	20.8%	43.8%
\$25,000 - \$50,000	32.0%	30.0%	38.9%	25.9%	26.0%	36.0%	29.2%	31.3%
\$50,000 - \$100,000	14.3%	14.5%	13.9%	14.8%	10.0%	12.0%	25.0%	18.8%
\$100,000 – 150,000	2.9%	1.8%	1.9%	1.9%	4.0%	4.0%	8.3%	6.3%
\$150,000 - \$200,000+								
More than \$200,000	1.5%	3.6%	0.0%	0.0%	2.0%	0.0%	4.2%	0.0%
Prefer not to answer	7.5%	4.5%	9.3%	13.0%	6.0%	6.0%	12.5%	0.0%

Table 5. Impact of Education Level on Perception of the Authenticity in Scenario 1

Level of Education	How authentic are the company's motives in conducting this initiative?							
	Total	1: Very inauthentic	2	3	4	5	6	7: Very authentic
Some High school	1.6%	2.3%	1.0%	1.8%	1.7%	2.0%	0.0%	2.1%
Highschool graduate	18.8%	15.1%	22.8%	15.5%	17.9%	20.4%	24.5%	17.0%
College credit	18.8%	19.8%	18.8%	15.5%	23.1%	17.3%	18.9%	17.0%
Associate degree	3.3%	3.5%	5.9%	1.8%	2.6%	6.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Bachelor's degree	38.4%	33.7%	31.7%	43.6%	35.9%	38.8%	37.7%	55.3%
Master's degree	16.2%	22.1%	15.8%	18.2%	16.2%	13.3%	18.9%	4.3%
Doctorate degree	1.3%	2.3%	1.0%	2.7%	0.0%	1.0%	0.0%	2.1%

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Ultimately, the qualitative and quantitative conclusions deduced throughout this analysis adheres to the initial hypothesis that companies with products that are tightly linked (integrated) to the E-CSR initiative will increase consumer purchase intention and positive perceptions more than companies with products that seem unrelated (peripheral) to the E-CSR initiative. Interestingly, consumers appeared to be impacted by the peripheral and partially integrated E-CSR initiative to a similar extent. This perhaps implies that consumers adopt a similar perception of company donations to environmental charities, regardless of how tightly linked the environmental charity is to the product or service that the corporation provides. Finally, there were various other moderators such as consumers' environmental views and demographic details that could impact the strength or extent of the relationship observed.

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