

A Strategic Approach to CSR Communication: Examining the Impact of Brand Familiarity on Consumer Responses

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ABSTRACT

Despite the widely acknowledged importance of corporate social responsibility (CSR) communications, our knowledge is limited with regard to various factors affecting consumer responses to such communication efforts. This paper aims to identify the extent to which prior brand familiarity influences consumer responses to CSR communications through a controlled experiment, exploring whether the use of different communication functions for environmental domain of CSR (i.e., publicity and advertising) generates any different effect on these responses. Findings reveal that familiar and unfamiliar brands do not differ from each other with regard to consumer attitude toward message, but elicit dissimilar responses in terms of attitude toward brand and purchase intentions. The study leads to managerial implications regarding the effective formulation and dissemination of CSR-related messages in order to achieve stakeholder engagement. Copyright © 2015 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd and ERP Environment

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Introduction

TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN RECENT DECADES HAVE RESULTED IN MORE INFORMATION SAVVY, SOPHISTICATED, and better-informed individuals. The ease of access to information results in greater knowledge of societal issues, generating further sensibility for environmental and public concerns (Tschopp & Nastanski, 2014). The shift in individuals' awareness of social topics has also affected their expectations of organizations: They are no longer simply interested in quality products or lower prices, but are rather concerned with companies' efforts to make a broader contribution to society (Fernando, 2010). Due to a 'fast-changing marketing environment characterized by savvier consumer and increased competition, as well as decreased effectiveness of traditional marketing tactics' (Keller, 2003, p. 595), it is now more crucial than ever for organizations to develop new strategic and

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tactical alternative initiatives in order to gain their stakeholders' appreciation and trust, which would result in stronger relationships and loyalty.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) can be considered an obvious alternative approach to differentiating organizations from their competitors (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001), thus strengthening stakeholder support and loyalty. CSR concerns companies' efforts to fulfil societal and environmental obligations without compromising the ultimate objective of profitability. Although there has been a greater emphasis on corporate citizenship (Hoeffler *et al.*, 2010; Veleva, 2010), it has similarly not been easy to get agreement on the concept of CSR (Dobers, 2009; Brejning, 2012; Amaladoss & Manohar, 2013). An early definition refers to CSR as 'a firm's consideration of, and response to, issues beyond (its) narrow economic, technical, and legal requirements' (Davis, 1973, p. 312), which is then extended by Carroll (1979, p. 500) to encompass the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations, highlighting the interdependence between the firm and the society (for more definitions see Dahlsrud, 2008; Hack *et al.*, 2014). In addition to the vital strategic role of CSR initiatives, organizations should also recognize the importance of communicating these activities. As the literature suggests, any CSR effort should be widely communicated in order to receive public acceptance, engagement (Maignan & Ferrell, 2004; Schuler & Cording, 2006; Pomeroy & Johnson, 2009), favorable consumer attitudes (Golob & Bartlett, 2007), and purchase intentions (Alniacik *et al.*, 2011) toward the organization. CSR communication refers to the ways in which 'companies present their CSR principles and practices to the public and investors' (Tang & Li, 2009, p. 200) and is a critical aspect for businesses aiming to develop relations based on, among other things, goodwill. Podnar (2008, p. 75) describes CSR communication as:

'a process of anticipating stakeholders' expectations, articulation of CSR policy and managing of different organization communication tools designed to provide true and transparent information about a company's or a brand's integration of its business operations, social and environmental concerns, and interactions with stakeholders'.

Appropriate management of this process is of utmost importance to businesses, since it can lead to and underpin positive stakeholder responses and, consequently, stronger relationships. Therefore, it is crucial to strategically plan and maintain the CSR communication process, taking into consideration the various factors that are important in capturing stakeholder attention and comprehension. In this context, the public relations literature focuses on a variety of factors, such as the comparison of marketing-oriented publicity and advertising (see Eisend & Küster, 2011 for a recent meta-analysis); however, there has been limited work on the relationship between the level of consumers' familiarity with the brand, and their responses to CSR communication. As the branding literature suggests that brand familiarity may contribute to a multitude of consumer responses (Machleit *et al.*, 1993; Lange & Dahlén, 2003; Delgado-Ballester *et al.*, 2012), practical reasoning requires placing emphasis on relevant CSR communication elements in relation to the level of familiarity in order to achieve positive attitude formation and build a strong corporate image. Moreover, since each communication element, particularly advertising and publicity, has its own characteristics with regard to their superiorities and priorities, the level of familiarity may necessitate 'a balance or emphasis on particular promotional elements' (Pickton & Broderick, 2005, p. 437). It is possible to acknowledge a few studies conducted with unfamiliar brands (Handelman & Arnold, 1999), and/or comparing familiar and unfamiliar brands (Brown & Dacin, 1997) with regard to CSR strategies. However, CSR communication studies are far more limited (Maignan & Ferrell, 2004; Polonsky & Jevons, 2009; Ihlen *et al.*, 2011), and those focusing on the effects of familiarity on consumer attitudes (towards message, brand, and purchase intention) and CSR communication elements are literally non-existent. In this context, this paper contributes to both theory and practice by providing insightful knowledge through an experimental study on an unexplored research field.

The paper is organized as follows: the next section reviews the literature on the background of CSR communication, including domains, message content, channels, and communication elements of CSR including publicity and advertising. A brief review on the role of brand familiarity in CSR-related messages is also provided. Research design and associated instruments are presented under methodology, which is followed by a thorough discussion of the findings highlighting the theoretical and practical contributions of the paper, along with further research suggestions.

Literature Review

Increasing Importance of CSR Communication and its Elements

A strategically well-planned and properly maintained CSR initiative attracts consumers (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003), cultivates stakeholder relationships (Du *et al.*, 2011), motivates employees (Ali *et al.*, 2010), improves brand equity (Hoeffler & Keller, 2002) and image (Heikkurinen, 2010; Popoli, 2011), increases reputation (McWilliams *et al.*, 2006; Melo & Garrido-Morgado, 2012) and eventually, achieves profits (Orlitzky *et al.*, 2003; Blomgren, 2011). It has been suggested that stakeholders need to know about these CSR efforts in order to consider them in their decision-making processes (Mohr *et al.*, 2001; Smith, 2001; Zbucha, 2014). In this context, it is of utmost importance for organizations to communicate those initiatives adequately and raise awareness in order to derive the maximum benefit from them (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001; Maignan & Ferrell, 2004).

Message content and channel (referred as the communication elements of CSR communication in this study) are key issues related to CSR communication, and are both specified within the framework developed by Du *et al.* (2010). This framework includes five factors. First, in terms of message content, the issue refers to the situations, which are considered the most suitable for business to make efforts to create improvement. The second aspect regarding the content of the message is the company's commitment to a CSR initiative. Dwyer *et al.* (1987, p. 19) define commitment, a prominent factor of communication, as 'an implicit or explicit pledge of relational continuity between exchange partners'. The authors describe three measurable criteria of commitment: inputs, durability, and consistency, and suggest that 'significant economic, communication, and/or emotional resources may be exchanged'. Thirdly, the content of message strategy pertains to the impact of a CSR initiative. Blowfield (2007, p. 683) defines impact as 'the outcomes associated with particular actions' and asserts that impact can be used in order to minimize or avoid criticism related to CSR. The fourth factor with regard to message content is that of motives, focusing on the reasons for carrying out CSR initiatives. According to Yoon *et al.* (2006), CSR initiatives can be assessed in three ways. In the first, corporate image is enhanced because consumers assume the company that implements a CSR program is sincere. The second alternative involves the failure of CSR activities to have an impact on the image of the company due to a lack of consumer confidence in the sincerity of its motives. In the final scenario, corporate image is damaged because consumers interpret the company's motives as insincere. The final factor with respect to message content is *CSR fit*. Du *et al.* (2010, p. 12) describe the concept as 'the perceived congruence between a social issue and the company's business'. Accordingly, Cone *et al.* (2003) recommend companies to support causes in line with company goals.

The communication element of CSR, which holds a prominent role in this study, suggests ways in which a company can communicate its CSR information to its intended audiences. As Du *et al.* (2010) note, many alternatives exist for companies looking to convey CSR messages, including, but not limited to reports, websites, advertisements, press releases, and product packaging.

Moreover, it is possible to classify communication elements as being subtle (Morsing & Schultz, 2006), passive (Pomering, 2011), or controllable by the company (Du *et al.*, 2010). Subtle communication refers to publicizing through minimal releases like annual reports and on websites. In contrast, the use of advertising and public relations is considered to be an example of broad and open communication of social responsibility (Morsing & Schultz, 2006). Pomering (2011) also indicates the presence of 'passive informational tools like annual reports and web sites'. Even though the mentioned tools are passive, the target audience is actively involved in CSR communication, and this particular situation can be considered to enable effective and efficient communication.

Du *et al.* (2010) approach the subject of CSR communication channels in terms of whether or not these are controlled by the company. In this regard, media coverage and word of mouth are considered as independent channels, since they remain beyond the company's control. Although there are positive aspects to controlling message attributes, it is also known to have some drawbacks. As the authors state: 'there is likely to be a trade-off between the controllability and credibility of CSR communication; the less controllable the communicator is, the more credible it is, and vice versa' (Du *et al.*, 2010, p. 13). Advertising can illustrate this situation. According to Sen *et al.* (2009, p. 205) 'advertising is more controllable but less credible', and thus poses a challenge in CSR communication. In order to overcome this, careful consideration must be given to certain points, such as the provision of factual messages (Berens & van Rekom, 2008) and the use of recognized and credible third party organizations (Pomering, 2011).

The Role of Brand Familiarity

In CSR communication, it is essential to consider the impact of branding, given its general importance. As Van Riel and Fombrun (2007), p. 118): ‘...when prompted with a corporate brand name or symbol, people spontaneously make different types of mental associations’. Branding, which affects consumers’ perceptions of a variety of marketing stimuli from advertising effectiveness to product quality (Keller, 1993) is also expected to have a similar influence on the perception and processing of CSR messages.

Defining familiarity as ‘the number of product-related experiences that have been accumulated by the consumer’, Alba and Hutchinson (1987, p. 411) indicate that brand familiarity can stem from various experiences, such as seeking information, obtaining references, receiving advertising message, interacting with sales personnel, or even using the product itself. While ‘knowledge’ and ‘familiarity’ are used interchangeably (Johnson & Russo, 1984; Johnson & Kellaris, 1988; Tam, 2008), Ha and Perks (2005, p. 442) point out that familiarity can be considered as umbrella term since ‘it is related to other important constructs including consumer expertise, prior knowledge and strength of belief.’

Apart from having a complex meaning, the term familiarity has a strategic importance for brand management, as it is related to consumers’ knowledge level, which directly affects their attitudes and/or behaviors. In this context, brand familiarity can be defined as ‘consumers’ brand knowledge structures, that is, the brand associations that exist within a consumer’s memory’ (Campbell & Keller, 2003, p. 293). It is clear that unless consumers have experience of a brand, they have no connotations to affect their brand perceptions. Thus, it can be said that, possible perception difference between familiar and unfamiliar brands should be considered as a crucial dimension when branding or communication strategies are set. In their research, Lange and Dahlén (2003) found that brand familiarity provides communicative advantages. Campbell and Keller (2003) also provided strong evidence that the effectiveness of communication is directly related to earlier familiarity of the brand. Focusing on the improvement of brand image, Delgado-Ballester *et al.* (2012) have also stressed the effect of brand knowledge structures. Their research reveals a clear distinction between familiar and unfamiliar brands in terms of the effectiveness of consistency among messages. While a myriad of studies suggests that consumers appraise a brand more positively when they are familiar with it, generate favourable associations (Zajonc & Markus, 1982; Aaker & Keller, 1990; Holden & Vanhuele, 1999), no specific focus is given to the effect of brand familiarity on perceived CSR messages, which poses an important theoretical gap.

The Relation between Brand Familiarity and CSR

The brand familiarity concept has been studied under a number of marketing-related fields, such as consumer behavior (Bravo *et al.*, 2012; Diallo *et al.*, 2013), communication message effects (Delgado-Ballester *et al.*, 2012), and purchase intentions (Diamantopoulos *et al.*, 2011; Nepomuceno *et al.*, 2014). There are even a few studies (Torelli *et al.*, 2012; Perera & Chaminda, 2013; Uhrich *et al.*, 2014) addressing the relation between consumer response to CSR and brand familiarity.

It is clear that individuals associate brands with certain terms, concepts, and features, which stem from their earlier experience with the brand. Consequently, consumers tend to interpret CSR information in regard to those interactions (Torelli *et al.*, 2012). The limited literature in this area includes Perera and Chaminda (2013), who compared the effect of varying degrees of brand familiarity on CSR response and identified a positive impact. Similarly, Obermiller *et al.* (2009) reveal that CSR activities lead to stronger influence when familiarity is high. However, conflicting results are also present, such as the findings of Berens *et al.* (2005), which conclude that a strong corporate brand visibility may in fact hinder the CSR effect on product evaluations.

The level of brand familiarity has also become an area of study in cause-related marketing, a prominent operationalization of CSR. A study conducted by Edmondson and Lafferty (2007) provides evidence for the relationship between familiarity and the effectiveness of the CSR message. According to their research, brand familiarity leads to stronger attitudes. Likewise, Shabbir *et al.* (2010) reveal that brand awareness, which may be considered

an indicator of familiarity (Sharp, 1996; Radder & Huang, 2008), has a partially mediating role on cause-related marketing campaigns, and may influence consumer purchase intentions. However, none of these studies specifically focuses on the effect of brand familiarity on consumer response by particularly highlighting the moderating role of communication elements of CSR, which constitute the core of this paper.

Methodology

Purpose and Hypotheses

As identified in the literature, communication elements have different strategic roles in conveying CSR-related messages. Pursuant to the moderating role of brand familiarity (Lafferty & Edmondson, 2014), this study aims to investigate whether the degree of familiarity with brand plays a role in consumer attitude to communication messages disseminated and whether there is any difference in attitude toward message disseminated by publicity and those disseminated through advertising. The following hypotheses are developed to this aim:

H1: *CSR communication of a familiar (real) brand will differ in effect on consumer attitude toward the message compared to that of an unfamiliar (fictitious) brand.*

Additionally, in order to identify the moderating role of communication elements on consumer attitudes with regard to brand familiarity, each element, i.e., advertising and publicity, is tested independently through the below hypotheses:

H1a: *CSR communication messages conveyed through advertising of a familiar (real) brand will differ in their effect on consumer attitude toward message compared to that of an unfamiliar (fictitious) brand.*

H1b: *CSR communication messages conveyed through publicity of a familiar (real) brand will differ in their effect on consumer attitude toward message compared to that of an unfamiliar (fictitious) brand.*

Apart from the attitude toward message, the authors aim to discover whether there is any difference in consumers' brand attitudes when they are exposed to CSR communication messages of both familiar and unfamiliar brands. In addition, the independent effect of each communication element (either advertising or publicity) on brand attitudes is also a focus of the research. Regarding these aims, following hypotheses are developed:

H2: *CSR communication messages of a familiar (real) brand will differ in their effect on attitude toward brand compared to that of an unfamiliar (fictitious) brand.*

H2a: *CSR communication messages conveyed through advertising of a familiar (real) brand will differ in their effect on attitude toward brand compared to an unfamiliar (fictitious) brand.*

H2b: *CSR communication messages conveyed through publicity of a familiar (real) brand will have a different effect on attitude toward brand compared to that of an unfamiliar (fictitious) brand.*

The final set of hypotheses that remain to be tested concerns the impact of CSR communication messages of familiar and unfamiliar brands on purchase intention. The different elements of CSR communication are analyzed through the following hypotheses, which correspond to the previous hypotheses.

H3: CSR communication messages of a familiar (real) brand will differ in their effect on purchase intention compared to that of an unfamiliar (fictitious) brand.

H3a: CSR communication messages conveyed through advertising of a familiar (real) brand will differ in their effect on purchase intention compared to that of an unfamiliar (fictitious) brand.

H3b: CSR communication messages conveyed through publicity of a familiar (real) brand will differ in their effect on purchase intention compared to that of an unfamiliar (fictitious) brand.

The proposed hypotheses are illustrated in the study model shown in Figure 1.

Research Design

This is a two-phase study designed to explore how brand familiarity influences three factors: the message perception, attitude toward brand, and purchase intention. The first phase aimed to develop the stimuli to be used in the second-phase experimentation, including the CSR domains preferred by consumers, determination of familiar and unfamiliar brand variables, top-of-mind brands in the retail industry, and a set of hypothetical brand names. In the second phase, an experimental design is implemented in order to test hypotheses.

First Phase

The first phase involved a survey of 569 participants in Izmir, Turkey, designed to evaluate their perception and awareness of CSR activities and domains employed by local retailers. The findings demonstrated that 'environmental sensitivity' [with a mean score of 4.35 out of a possible 5.00] was the most significant domain, and is therefore incorporated into the second phase (See Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001, for a discussion of CSR domains). The company selected for the top-of-mind retailer brand was Tansas, a national retailer with more than 200 stores nationwide as of 2013, and consequently chosen as one of the stimuli in the experimental study. The unfamiliar (fictitious) brand to counterpart the familiar brand (i.e., Tansas) was decided upon testing for a set of hypothetical brand names generated by the authors. This test included the evaluation of six hypothetical brands by the respondents, based on preferences for names and logos. Responses were analyzed with one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test to eliminate the most and least popular brand names/logos, as such a positive or negative reaction might also result in bias toward CSR communication. The hypothetical brand 'Marketa' was chosen for the second stage, having the lowest absolute value for the row of extreme differences (.344), thus reflecting a neutral perception by consumers. In order to provide consistency between stimuli, and to begin from a similar reference point in terms of treatment, the same visual cues and content were designed for two brands.

Second Phase

The second phase of the study employed a 2x2 factorial design, in which respondents were randomly assigned to one of four groups. The experimental design, depicted in Figure 2, enabled the researchers to make comparisons across groups, i.e., the impact of CSR communication of a familiar versus unfamiliar brand on consumer

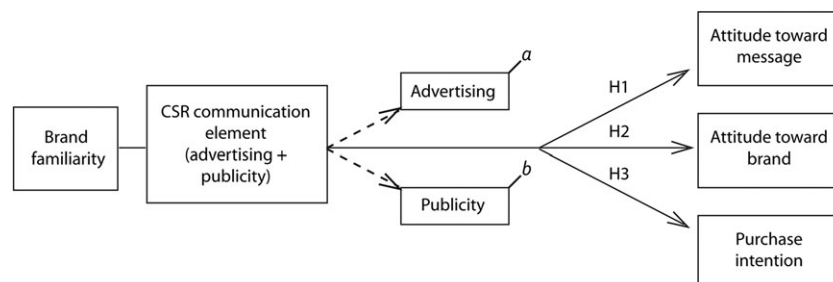


Figure 1. The study model

responses, and the impact of the particular communication element for different levels of brand familiarity. These four groups were paired up while comparative analyses of CSR communication between familiar and unfamiliar brands were run with regard to different communication elements.

Research Instruments

The research instruments involved a particular experiment stimulus for each group, accompanied by a set of questions to elicit attitude toward message and attitude toward brand, as well as the respondents' purchase intentions regarding the particular retailer brand.

The stimuli were designed as either a news article (publicity) or an advertisement (advertising) of the same length, about a CSR activity that had been carried out by the particular retailer brand, set within an entire newspaper page. As the most preferred CSR domain was found to be environmental sensitivity in the first phase, the experimental stimuli reported a CSR activity involving 'planting 2 million trees'. Each experimental group was given a specifically produced article or advertisement bearing the name of either the real or the fictitious brand (Tansas or Marketa) accordingly. The CSR advertisement was computer designed, based on a previous CSR advertisement by Tansas, in order to guarantee the continuity of brand associations. Both ads were presented with the same Turkish tagline, which translates as 'We are planting 2 million trees', and the articles were written in a similar tone, bearing the same message. The literature reveals that CSR communication necessitates including concrete results and preferably the endorsement of a third party organization in order to foster credibility (Pomeroy, 2011), therefore the stimuli were developed accordingly. The advertisements and news articles were then positioned in the lower-left corner of the front page of a national newspaper (*Hurriyet*), which has one of the highest circulation rates in Turkey. This publication was identified as being the most reliable national newspaper by independent authorities (Synovate as cited in *Hurriyet*, 2009).

During the experiment, the respondents were requested to consider the particular news article/advertisement, and then asked to answer a questionnaire. Attitude toward message was evaluated on a total of four statements rated on 5-point Likert scales. The statements were based on adjectives (good, appealing, likeable, and interesting), which had been identified by previous research (Shiv *et al.*, 1997; as translated to Turkish by Yağcı & İlarıslan, 2010). Evaluations were made of the attitude toward the retailer brand and purchase intentions on a set of seven statements, which focused on future intentions to purchase, perception of satisfaction and positive feelings. This set was also based on the studies of Shiv *et al.* (1997), and Yağcı and İlarıslan (2010). Remaining questions aimed to collect demographics.

Sample

The first phase of the study employed 569 respondents from Izmir, Turkey, through convenient sampling. This relatively large sample size was deemed appropriate to offset the limitations presented by this type of sampling.

In the second phase, which involved experimentation, the required sample size was calculated by using the formula proposed by Lusk and Shogren (2007), with a confidence interval of 95% and test power of 90%. The solution required 84 subjects to be assigned to each group for the comparison of familiar and unfamiliar brands in proposed research hypotheses, i.e., familiar brand (Groups 1 and 2 combined), and unfamiliar brand (Groups 3 and 4 combined), bringing the total to over 170. The actual sample size was extended to a total of 291, to allow for matching

Familiarity with the retailer brand	CSR Communication Element	
	Advertising	Publicity
Familiar Brand (Tansas)	Group 1	Group 2
Unfamiliar Brand (Marketa)	Group3	Group4

Figure 2. Research design

groups with regard to demographics. A review of previous research with similar purposes also revealed that this sample size was quite sufficient (Hallahan, 1999).

Findings

The first phase of the study involved 569 respondents, of whom 58% were female, 62.9% between 26 and 45 years, and 90.5% educated to at least a high-school level. The scale used to measure CSR awareness was composed of 12 items, with an internal validity of 83.3% (Cronbach α). This phase concluded that consumers perceived 'environment' ($X=4.35\pm 0.90$) as the most critical CSR domain, followed by the 'product' (mean= 4.27 ± 0.92) Table 1.

The second phase of the study entailed a total of 291 respondents randomly assigned to experimental groups, where 46.7% were females, 56.2% between 26 and 45 years, 78.1% educated to at least high-school level, and 38.1% from the upper-middle of a higher income group. Before the comparative analyses, Chi-Square Test of Independence was conducted to confirm that all experimental groups were matched samples with regard to demographics, yielding no statistically significant differences between groups with regard to gender, age, education, marital status, and income level, and therefore ensuring the subsequent tests were not influenced by demographic diversity. The three scales, designed to measure attitude toward message, attitude toward brand, and purchase intention, yielded Cronbach α scores of 81.1%, 81.9% and 86.9%, respectively. The research hypotheses were tested by independent-sample t-tests.

The first hypothesis (H1) aimed to investigate whether CSR communication of a familiar brand will differ in its effect on consumer attitude toward message compared to that of an unfamiliar brand. An independent sample t-test demonstrates that the findings are not significant at $p < 0.05$, concluding that familiar and unfamiliar brands do not differ with regard to consumer attitude toward message. H1a and H1b aimed to test the attitude toward message with regard to advertising and publicity, while neither hypotheses were supported at $p < 0.05$ level (0.564 and 0.656, respectively).

Testing for the second hypothesis concluded that CSR communication messages for a familiar brand will differ in effect on attitude toward brand, compared to that of an unfamiliar brand, significant at $p < 0.05$. The same test was run to identify any differences on attitude toward brand regarding CSR communication messages conveyed through advertising of a familiar brand compared to an unfamiliar one. Similarly, the result of comparison revealed that the difference between familiar and unfamiliar brands with respect to attitude toward brand when messages carried by advertising was significant at $p < 0.05$. On the other hand, testing for the publicity counterpart of the above hypothesis, H2b resulted in an insignificant difference, implying that CSR communication messages conveyed through publicity of a familiar brand did not differ in their effect on attitude toward brand compared to that of an unfamiliar brand ($p=0.089$).

Finally, H3 hypothesized that a CSR communication message for a familiar (real) brand will differ in its effect on purchase intentions compared to that of an unfamiliar (fictitious) brand. Findings revealed that the claim holds at p

	CSR COMMUNICATION COMBINED			CSR ADVERTISING			CSR PUBLICITY		
	Brand Familiarity		p-value	Brand Familiarity		p-value	Brand Familiarity		p-value
	Familiar Mean(SD)	Unfamiliar Mean(SD)		Familiar Mean(SD)	Unfamiliar Mean(SD)		Familiar Mean(SD)	Unfamiliar Mean(SD)	
ATTITUDE TOWARD MESSAGE	3.91 (0.80)	3.83 (0.90)	0.479	3.82 (0.81)	3.73 (0.97)	0.564	4.02 (0.77)	3.96 (0.79)	0.656
ATTITUDE TOWARD BRAND	3.97 (0.72)	3.66 (0.79)	0.001*	3.98 (0.69)	3.62 (0.72)	0.002*	3.95 (0.76)	3.70 (0.87)	0.089
PURCHASE INTENTION	3.93 (0.88)	3.60 (0.91)	0.002*	4.02 (0.81)	3.55 (0.88)	0.001*	3.82 (0.97)	3.66 (0.94)	0.364

Table 1. Findings.

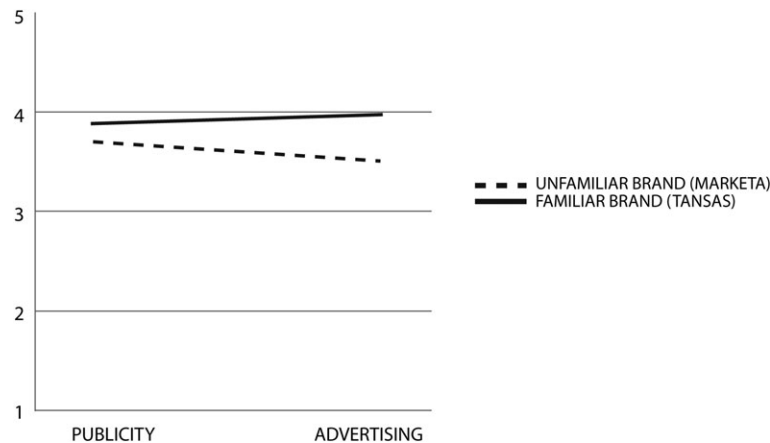


Figure 3. Attitude toward brand

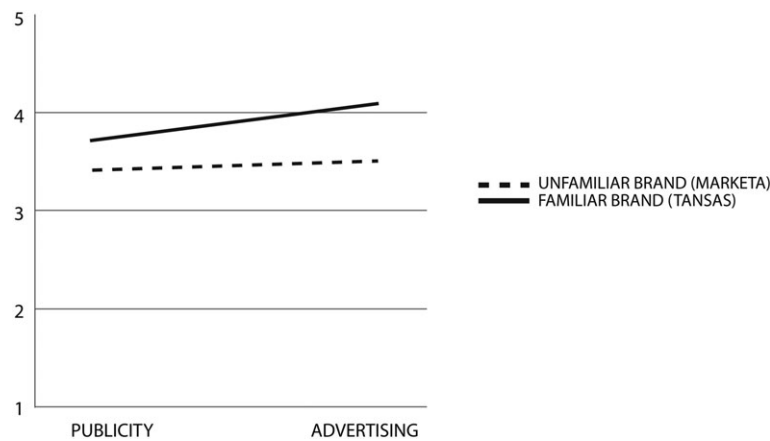


Figure 4. Purchase intention

< 0.05 , as well as H3a, which tests the difference for advertising only (0.002 and 0.001, respectively). In other words, a CSR communication message conveyed through advertising of a familiar (real) brand differs in its effect on purchase intentions compared with an unfamiliar (fictitious) brand. In contrast, H3b was not supported ($p=0.364$), revealing that there was no statistically valid difference between a familiar and unfamiliar brand on purchase intention when the CSR message was delivered through publicity. The differential effects of CSR advertising and publicity, both on brand attitudes (H2 a and b), and purchase intentions (H3 a and b) are depicted in Figures 3 and 4.

Discussion and Conclusion

Heightened interest in the role of businesses in society makes CSR a powerful strategy for increasing companies' competitive advantage. Nevertheless, as Fifka and Berg (2014, p. 255) argue, 'the complexity resulting from the great variety of potential goals and stakeholder expectations makes it essential to manage CSR strategically in order to successfully implement it.' From a strategic standpoint, it is important not only to develop and implement a CSR initiative, but also to recognize the importance of communicating it. Unless awareness is generated through communication, it will be impossible to benefit from the cognitive and emotional responses to CSR initiatives that elicit goodwill from stakeholders. An experiment by Sen *et al.* (2006) provides strong support for this phenomenon, showing that a single initiative aimed at increasing awareness of CSR activity can produce changes in behavioral

intentions. Moreover, as pointed out by Ihlen *et al.* (2011, p. 11), even ‘silence on the matter of CSR is also a form of communication... [as] communication is inescapable’. Therefore, it is advisable for business to invest time and effort in managing communication.

As an instrument to create awareness about CSR initiatives, CSR communication requires different strategic approaches and implementation considerations depending on the particular company situation. One of the situational factors that influences responses to CSR communication, i.e., brand familiarity, is also an important construct in consumer behavior literature (Baker *et al.*, 1986; Kent & Allen, 1994; Campbell & Keller, 2003; Lin, 2013; Lee, 2014). Thus, building on previous research on brand familiarity, this study set out to explore the relationships among brand familiarity, CSR communication, consumer attitudes, and purchase intention. The empirical results suggest that familiarity with a brand evokes significantly different responses compared with a lack of familiarity. Particularly, consumer response is affected by brand recall, and the retention of associations that are stored in the memory. However, these responses are not elicited under certain conditions relating to the particular form of CSR communication. Besides brand familiarity, another factor that influences responses to CSR communication is the source of information or the communication element involved, for example, whether the source is advertising or publicity. In the marketing communication literature, extensive research has been done regarding the role of different elements of promotion mix, i.e., advertising and publicity (Schwarz *et al.* 1986; Preston & Scharbach, 1971; Hallahan, 1995; Jin *et al.*, 2008; Küster-Rohde, 2009). Research has focused on the relative importance of publicity and advertising, which are the taken-for-granted conveyors of information about CSR (Du *et al.*, 2010), and recommend empirical comparison between these conveyors (Morsing *et al.*, 2008; Sen *et al.*, 2009). Nevertheless, to date, no study has empirically addressed the issue of information source, with the exception of Skard and Thorbjørnsen (2013). The findings from this current study provide partial support for the propositions put forward in previous research. In the first place, the hypotheses targeting attitude toward message are rejected on the basis of experimental results. In other words, consumers find no difference between the CSR messages communicated by familiar and unfamiliar brands. A similar lack of difference is also observed in regard to the form of communication, whether advertising or publicity.

One possible explanation for the ‘no difference’ result is affective response to CSR message. As the literature reveals, ad affect is a significant antecedent of attitude (Teng & Laroche, 2007; Kim *et al.*, 2012). That is, positive affect is influential in improving consumers’ attitude toward message, regardless of brand familiarity and the particular communication element used. Moreover, the finding is also consistent with research from Park *et al.* (2004), which indicates no significant difference in attitude to an alignment advertisement of an established brand, in comparison to that of an unknown one.

With regard to the second and third set of hypotheses, only partial support is found. Results demonstrate statistically valid differences between familiar and unfamiliar brands in terms of total and advertising attitude toward brand and purchase intention; but fail to reveal significant differences related to publicity attitudes and purchase intention. Overall, the evidence offers support for advocates of CSR publicity, justifying some of the previous results with regard to the comparison of marketing-oriented publicity and advertising in the research literature. According to a meta-analysis of 30 studies conducted by Eisend and Küster (2011, p. 918) ‘publicity is more effective (in terms of attitude toward message, attitude toward brand, and positive cognitive responses) than advertising for unknown products’. Regarding CSR communication, the findings of the current study accord with this statement, with the exception of attitude toward message. To summarize, the previous knowledge of the brand influences the effectiveness of CSR communication only under the condition of advertising. More specifically, unfamiliar brands are less likely to benefit from CSR advertising than they are from CSR publicity.

Implications

Managerial Implications

A deeper understanding of the impact of brand familiarity on consumer response to CSR initiatives can provide practitioners with insightful knowledge on CSR communication. This has the potential to lead to managerial implications regarding the effective formulation and dissemination of CSR-related messages in order to achieve stakeholder engagement. Therefore, the findings of this study make a valuable contribution to the business environment, in which the

issue of communication strategies remains as perhaps the least well-defined aspect of CSR practice, especially when compared with the importance given to corporate governance and corporate sustainability (Dawkins, 2004). Practitioners should bear in mind that there is no common or structured communication format for maximizing the impact of CSR messages in terms of building relationship and trust. There are many factors to be considered by managers before they envision their companies' CSR policies (Podnar, 2008; Armstrong & Taylor, 2014). Findings reveal, however, that brand familiarity, or the lack of it, i.e., the focus of this study, is a factor that has an impact on consumer responses to CSR initiatives. Thus, practitioners have to regard brand awareness and/or the level of brand familiarity among its stakeholder groups to better meet their expectations and to achieve wider commitment to CSR.

The influence of employed communication forms, in particular advertising and public relations, is another managerial viewpoint that should not be ignored by practitioners. To be successful, it is necessary for companies to understand the characteristics, and advantages and disadvantages of each CSR communication form (Pohl, 2008; Shimp & Andrews, 2013; Spotts *et al.*, 2014) for both familiar and unfamiliar brands. This knowledge can assist practitioners to develop creative advertisements to attract stakeholders, as appropriate, and also publicity supported by strong content to provide sufficient information to interested groups. The findings of the study have significant implications for professionals, who need to consider that the brand familiarity condition is a significant factor, and that, in the case of familiar brands, the effectiveness of CSR advertising may surpass that of CSR publicity. In this context, familiar brands are likely to benefit from both CSR publicity and advertising, and even from the simultaneous use of these channels. On the other hand, CSR advertising may not be an effective means for unfamiliar brands, and such firms should at all times opt for CSR publicity. One classic example is the caring cosmetics corporation, The Body Shop. Once an unfamiliar brand, the company built its image around social responsibility. The strategy of social responsibility not only reinforces brand awareness, but, as stated by McWilliams and Siegel (2001), also leads to rapid growth for the company. Moreover, it should be noted that The Body Shop implemented a policy of relying entirely on publicity, and never attempted to advertise its products.

To sum up, practitioners should gain a deeper understanding of the CSR notion to ensure the adoption of stakeholder perspective, to meet those stakeholder groups' expectations, and to gain their approval and sympathy. But beyond that, as the findings suggest, CSR-related communication should always entail carefully considered, well-designed, appropriate strategies and effectively managed implementations. In other words, the findings demonstrate strong evidence of the importance of deciding on *how to say* rather than *what to say* with regard to a CSR message. Good social performance supported by effective communication can lead to positive perceptions and goodwill toward the organization.

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical contribution of this paper is twofold: It provides important insights into the academic discussion on comparison of familiar and unfamiliar brands in terms of CSR communication, which has been very limited to date. Moreover, by investigating the moderating role of communication elements on consumer attitudes, it addresses in an important gap in the literature and provides new directions for future research.

Certain theoretical implications of this study stem from the future research recommendations specified by Perera and Chaminda (2013) and Skard and Thorbjørnsen (2013). Accordingly, the current study deliberately made use of an experimental design that also involved an actual brand to enhance its validity, as suggested by Perera and Chaminda (2013). Moreover, Skard and Thorbjørnsen (2013), who mainly focus on the source effects in CSR communication in their study, suggest that research should be extended to other moderators. Thus, our study adds value to the emerging body of knowledge in CSR communication by examining the effect of brand familiarity as an important moderator of consumers' responses to CSR communication.

Limitations and Further Research

Delimitations of the study include the use of a specific industry (retail) and consumers living in certain area (Izmir, Turkey). This study is also delimited in scope, since it examines only print media (newspaper). Another possible

limitation is the artificiality of the situation regarding the exposure to news and advertisements, which is a consequence of the experimental method, as designated in this study. Efforts were made to make the experiment as natural as possible, by placing texts in newspapers, and providing respondents with sufficient time to read these. However, there is no guarantee that, in real life, the participants would have taken any notice of the texts.

Recommendations for future research may arise from the delimitations in the study. Accordingly, conducting similar studies in other industries will offer new insights into CSR communication. Regarding the attitude of the respondents, it is suggested that future studies should investigate other stakeholders' (e.g. employees') perceptions on the effectiveness of CSR communication. Moreover, future research may benefit from comparing CSR communication in other types of media, such as audio-visual media. Finally, it may be useful to focus on different constructs of brand equity, such as the brand image, brand personality, or brand loyalty, as a moderator of communication effectiveness.

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