



Research Article

Internal versus External Corporate Social Responsibility: Company Age and Size Moderate CSR Efficacy

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ABSTRACT

CSR efforts by established legacy brands are often seen as inauthentic. What can brands do to genuinely engage in corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts? This study investigates internal CSR as a potential solution. CSR type (internal and external) and extrinsic cues (brand size and age) interact to affect congruence, authenticity, and subsequent purchase intention for companies that communicate these efforts on social media. Through a series of three experiments, we compare the effectiveness of internal and external CSR in influencing consumer perceptions. Results confirm that CSR is not a one-size-fits-all solution for brands. We find that Internal CSR is more effective for legacy (older, larger) brands, while external CSR is more effective for novel (newer, smaller) brands. This paper is among the first to conceptualize internal CSR as a potential strategy for legacy brands that often struggle for authentic ways to get involved with social issues. Results indicate that consumers want to see larger, older brands try to "fix" themselves before they attempt to fix the world.

KEYWORDS

corporate social responsibility, sustainability, legacy brands, authenticity

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I. Introduction

In the realm of corporate social responsibility (CSR), legacy brands face very real challenges in effectively aligning their initiatives with contemporary societal expectations. These venerable brands are often entrenched in traditional CSR models, and some have encountered notable difficulties in identifying and implementing outlets for their CSR endeavors that resonate authentically with modern consumer sensibilities. The negative publicity that followed failed campaigns such as Starbucks' "Race Together" campaign in 2015 or Pepsi's "Live For Now" ad with Kendall Jenner in 2017 far outweighs any consumer goodwill, particularly for consumers who identify

with the brand (Einwiller et al., 2019). Similarly, after posting about donations made to the Black Lives Matter movement and other civil rights organizations, the CEO of the sustainable fashion brand Reformation resigned when accusations of racism within the organization came to light in the comments sections of those same posts (Ho, 2020). On the other hand, brands such as Ben and Jerry's and REI have CSR efforts that are received well by consumers, due to their long-time commitment to activism and environmentalism, respectively. Consumers increasingly demand that brands and organizations take stances on the social issues they care about (Cone Communications (2015), but how can legacy brands get involved in a social



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cause with which they have no previous history?

CSR, one way for brands to engage with social causes, is defined as the “management of stakeholder concern for responsible and irresponsible acts related to environmental, ethical and social phenomena in a way that creates corporate benefit” (Vaaland et al., 2008, p. 931), but it can also be generally understood as any activity where a firm goes beyond compliance and contributes to the greater social good (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001). CSR is increasingly important to contemporary consumers, thus more and more brands are engaging in it; however, the more brands engage in it, the more savvy and skeptical consumers become of CSR in general. Correspondingly, prominent brands have been accused of woke-washing, or “appropriating the language of social activism into marketing materials” without substantial action taken to address those issues (Dowell & Jackson, 2020). To avoid woke-washing and show commitment to change, companies need to prioritize holding themselves accountable, commit to structural change, and address hierarchical power dynamics between the organization and employees (see Dowell and Jackson, 2020 for a detailed explanation of these points). Brands can choose to focus their CSR efforts internally on the organization or externally on a cause outside of the organization. Perceived authenticity—how genuine or organic the initiatives appear to consumers—is crucial to the success of these efforts (Pérez, 2019). Furthermore, since CSR messages are often disseminated on social media, authenticity is also necessary to cut through the clutter of meaningless commercialization on social media platforms (Campagna et al., 2021).

Using extant theorizing on brand authenticity (Pérez, 2019) and research on congruency (Sung et al., 2022) to inform our reasoning, we investigate how consumers in the United States process and evaluate messages promoting internal and external CSR, and we probe brand authenticity as the causal mechanism underlying message effectiveness. This research contributes to the literature on brand authenticity and congruency by investigating how these factors facilitate the relationship between CSR strategies and consumer outcomes. Furthermore,

based on theorizing suggesting that congruency and relative social impact are key antecedents to authenticity (Pérez, 2019), we probe brand age and size as boundary conditions of this effect. In considering authenticity as a mechanism, we explain why it is essential to consider CSR type and brand extrinsic cues in tandem to understand consumers’ reactions to CSR messages on social media.

The aim of this study is to further understanding of CSR initiatives for legacy and novel brands that are perceived as meaningful and genuine. Specifically, proposing that there may not be a one-size-fits-all solution and that extrinsic brand cues play a role in how these messages are received, we focus on comparing consumer responses to advertising campaigns that emphasize external CSR (e.g., donating to charity) and internal CSR (e.g., funding initiatives within the organization) and their interaction with extrinsic brand cues that affect willingness to purchase from those brands in the future.

The rest of the paper proceeds as follows. First, we review the literature on CSR in general, followed by internal versus external CSR and extrinsic brand cues to conceptualize our first two hypotheses. Then we review the literature on brand authenticity and congruence to propose our third and fourth hypotheses. Next, we document methods and results of a series of 3 studies to test our hypotheses that extrinsic cues such as brand age (established/old versus new/novel) and size (many employees versus few) moderate CSR type to influence congruence, perceived authenticity, and subsequently purchase intention. Finally, we discuss the theoretical and managerial implications of our findings and posit future research directions.

2. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

2.1. Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is defined as actions that organizations take to contribute to the benefit of society beyond those legally required of them (Enderle & Tavis, 1998) to satisfy social needs (Angelidis & Ibrahim, 1993). CSR efforts can be distinguished based on whether efforts are aimed within the organization (internal) or toward an out-

ward societal cause (external). External CSR includes initiatives such as an organization's donations toward a social cause while internal CSR efforts may include activities such as initiatives to increase diversity within an organization. Fortune 500 companies now spend more than \$20 billion each year on CSR (Iglesias et al., 2022). The practical rationale behind CSR efforts is the idea that businesses perform well in a flourishing society (McIntosh et al., 1998), and CSR efforts build the consumer/brand relationship (Uhlig et al., 2020). In other words, corporations that engage in CSR contribute to society and reap consumer economic benefits. CSR efforts are linked to corporate performance due to the corporation's increased reputation through engagement in such actions (Bronn & Vrioni, 2001). For example, benefits from an enhanced reputation include the ability to charge higher prices (Habel et al., 2016). However, this reputation and the associated benefits are only available to the extent that publics are aware of them and trust them. Because of this, CSR efforts are often publicized through messaging strategies that promote these efforts, usually on social media (Sun & Wang, 2019).

The idea that corporations should actively address social issues is not new. CSR consists of initiatives by organizations to address social, socioeconomic, and environmental issues related to business processes (Christensen et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2021) and tends to have positive outcomes for companies (Havlinova & Kukacka, 2021). However, consumer skepticism diminishes the effectiveness of CSR efforts (Bae, 2020; Dalal, 2020; Pomeroy & Johnson, 2009), and success relies on consumers' perceived trust in the organization (Alhouthi et al., 2016; Colleoni, 2013). Research indicates that CSR efforts are not equally effective for all brands and that extrinsic brand factors such as age and size are essential when considering CSR alternatives (Robinson & Wood, 2018; Sung et al., 2022; Till & Nowak, 2000; Zhang et al., 2019).

2.2. External and Internal CSR Messaging

CSR initiatives can vary but generally involve a company financially contributing to some larger social

issue/need through their philanthropy or business practices (Hydock et al., 2020). Hydock et al. (2020) further differentiate CSR from corporate political advocacy (CPA), in which a brand claims a position on a controversial sociopolitical issue. The authors state that while CSR tends to be supported by consumers, CPA, due to its controversial nature, tends to generate a polarized response. Because both CSR and CPA can include initiatives both within the organization and external to the organization, and we investigate causes both controversial (e.g., racial justice) and not (e.g., education), we refer more broadly to external and internal CSR to conceptualize the present research. However, it should be noted that, according to Hydock et al. (2020), statements of support/solidarity more directly fall into the category of CPA rather than CSR.

External CSR is a strategy in which a company contributes to a social issue or need outside of the organization, usually through philanthropy or business practices (Hydock et al., 2020). Consumer participation is often, but not always, leveraged to achieve philanthropic goals (Tangari et al., 2010; Varadarajan & Menon, 1988). External CSR campaigns often include donations made from consumer purchases quantified as a "percentage of net proceeds" (Grau et al., 2007) or employee volunteerism (Hydock et al., 2020). To be effective, scholars note that it is essential that external CSR efforts are tied to an organization's mission and are not used as a short-term tactic, highlighting the relationship-building nature of these endeavors and implying the importance of these initiatives being authentic.

External CSR can improve consumer attitudes toward brands, usually when there is a high congruency (e.g., brand/cause fit;) (Nan & Heo, 2007; Kim et al., 2015), but occasionally when there is not (Pittman & Sheehan, 2020). Research indicates that external CSR as a strategy is generally effective and influences consumer choice (Barone et al., 2000), brand sales (Strahilevitz & Myers, 1998), brand switching (Smith & Alcorn, 1991), improves the image of the organization (Ross et al., 1992; Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004), and enhances brand loyalty (Van Den

Brink et al., 2006). Other research indicates real-world prosocial benefits of external CSR campaigns. In addition to the brand that utilizes it, external CSR benefits any associated non-profits (Lafferty & Goldsmith, 2005). External CSR campaigns can also bring new members to social conversations, and members' commitment to the cause endures after the campaign (Holiday et al., 2020).

Yet, external CSR is not without its drawbacks. For example, while Nike is a brand often lauded as being focused on racial justice, a look at the racial composition of Nike's leadership team indicates that "Nike is not part of the change it seeks to promote" (Ritson, 2020). In other words, consumers are no longer satisfied with brands contributing to social causes without first addressing and dismantling social inequities within the organization (Dowell & Jackson, 2020; Ho, 2020) and consumers may be skeptical of campaigns that seem to lack authenticity (Dalal, 2020; Pittman & Sheehan, 2020). The perception that a brand is merely "washing" its messaging with superficial virtue-signaling is detrimental because it lowers consumer confidence in the actual causes and related products (Delmas & Burbano, 2011).

In contrast to external CSR, which focuses on initiatives external to an organization (e.g., partnership with charity), internal CSR highlights internal initiatives, such as those that address social justice issues or climate change programs implemented within the organization itself. One way to avoid criticisms of inauthenticity may be through internal CSR because these initiatives focus on internal change that can align corporate structures with current understandings of the role of organizations in society. In other words, as public attitudes toward the role corporations should take on social issues shift, internal CSR can be implemented to help brands better reflect and address these changing attitudes. Perhaps due to this shift in societal attitudes, companies are increasingly incorporating internal CSR activities into their communications (Basil & Erlandson, 2008).

Internal CSR is distinct from external CSR as it encompasses broader notions of "strength, expertise, and power of teams, progress, improvement, family,

and diversity" of an organization (Loveland et al., 2019, P. 336). In other words, as opposed to external CSR, which focuses on a brand's partnership with a non-profit organization, or contribution to social good outside the organization, internal CSR highlights the initiatives that an organization is taking within to promote social change. For example, a company may demonstrate its commitment to social justice through partnering with/donating to an external organization (e.g., ACLU) or they can "walk the walk" and create social justice initiatives within their own organization (e.g., increasing diversity in leadership positions). In this way, internal CSR can help show consumers that a company is committed to the change they profess to care about and go beyond statements of solidarity without action. Hawn and Ioannou (2016) demonstrate that although external and internal CSR can be used in tandem to increase an organization's performance, a disconnect between external "talk" and internal "action" negatively impacts performance. This finding highlights the important role that internal CSR can play in consumer outcomes.

It is possible that this strategy will avoid some of the pitfalls of external CSR by highlighting an organization's commitment to holding themselves accountable for the issues and values they espouse as important. In other words, while external CSR highlights the willingness of organizations to partner with those committed to social issues, internal CSR indicates the willingness of organizations to do the work themselves. By addressing internal manifestations of social issues, brands signal a deeper level of engagement with these issues and a commitment to acting on—as opposed to throwing money at—a problem.

Despite the benefits of internal CSR, there are also potential drawbacks, especially regarding how consumers perceive internal CSR messaging. Because they refer to change within an organization, internal CSR messages highlight the presence of a problematic social issue within the organization that may otherwise go undetected to the consumer. Furthermore, internal CSR claims are viewed most positively when substantiated by an external source, although internal CSR claims, regardless of source, tend to increase

positive perceptions of the organization (Carlini & Grace, 2021).

Additionally, consumers generally perceive CSR as contributing to inflated pricing practices such that the cost of CSR initiatives to the organization is incorporated into product pricing structures - with costly or large-scale CSR initiatives assumed to be associated with higher product costs (Habel et al., 2016). Other research indicates that consumers view a focus on social responsibility as inversely related to the quality of the product (Robinson & Wood, 2018). The latter is especially the case for new brands, indicating the importance of considering brand extrinsic cues when seeking to understand the impact of CSR messaging.

2.3. Theoretical Framework

To further understand the impact of external and internal CSR on consumer response, we examine boundary conditions (such as the extrinsic brand cues of age and size of an organization) and mechanisms (congruency and authenticity) that underlie this relationship. For this reason, we employ Pérez's (2019) theoretical framework. In the model, CSR fit (or congruency) and social impact specificity (the extent to which a brand's contributions are deemed appropriate relative to size) are two of three antecedents to CSR message authenticity. The third is social topic information – which relates to awareness of the social causes of the CSR activity. Message authenticity is then linked to credibility and consumer outcomes – such as purchase, loyalty, and advocacy. In short, this model positions extrinsic cues (through the incorporation of social impact specificity), congruency, and the topic of the CSR initiative as antecedents to authenticity, which mediates the relationship between the antecedents and consumer outcomes (Kim & Lee, 2019). Thus, drawing upon Pérez's (2019) model of CSR message authenticity and notions of fit and social impact specificity, we expect that extrinsic brand cues of company age and size are essential for predicting the effect of internal and external CSR efforts. Furthermore, we examine the impact of authenticity and congruency on internal and external CSR communications. We detail extrinsic brand cues, authenticity, and congruency in the following sections.

2.3.1. Extrinsic Brand Cues

In addition to potential benefits and drawbacks of both internal and external CSR, organizations must weigh other factors when choosing whether to and how to engage in CSR. Prior research indicates that the effect of CSR activities is not uniform for all organizations. Specifically, extrinsic brand cues such as age and size are key to establishing the boundary of successful CSR communications. Brand age refers to the length of time the brand has existed and serves as an extrinsic cue that affects brand trust (Zhang et al., 2019), usually positively. Brand size refers to the number of employees within an organization (Burmann et al., 2009). These extrinsic brand cues are related, as consumers often associate brand size with brand age and vice versa. Robinson and Wood (2018) demonstrate that CSR initiatives are beneficial for legacy (old, established) brands but may backfire for new brands. Other research indicates that old brands gain less from engagement with external CSR than new brands (Till & Nowak, 2000). Thus, it is essential to incorporate extrinsic these brand cues into an understanding of how CSR affects consumers' willingness to purchase from that brand. However, most research to date has focused on the CSR efforts of large companies. Correspondingly, little is known about how consumers perceive the CSR efforts of small companies (Sung et al., 2022).

As mentioned above, external CSR presents the risk that consumers interpret these efforts as hollow, while internal CSR may backfire when it highlights organizational problems. We propose that brand age and size are intimately tied to consumer reception of CSR efforts in the following way. Large and old brands have less flexibility to accommodate a change in their structures (Stigler, 1939; Carlsson, 1989), or they were established in previous eras in which contemporary social issues were understood and addressed differently than they are today. In fact, established brands are advised to look at new players to develop their adaptive strategies, indicating the inherent flexibility associated with a newly developing organization (Reeves & Deimler, 2012). For this reason, when legacy brands address social issues within the company, it may be viewed as

more congruent with our contemporary understandings of what is needed by the brand to affect social change within a rapidly changing society. In line with this reasoning, we can expect that internal CSR messages will be more effective for legacy organizations than novel organizations because it demonstrates an authentic effort for change. Formally:

H1: For a legacy brand, purchase intention will be higher with an internal CSR message than with an external CSR message.

In contrast, small and new brands have more flexibility to respond to social change and are established in contemporary contexts (Reeves & Deimler, 2012). Small organizations differ from large organizations in some specific ways that affect how consumers view their CSR efforts (1) their owners/founders often start businesses in line with their personal values (Smith & Alexander, 2013), (2) personal relationships, both internally with employees and externally with the local community, are the key to small business success (Russo & Perrini, 2010; Spence, 1999; Smith & Alexander, 2013), and (3) small businesses have fewer resources than large business, which equates to less money to contribute to external causes (Perrini et al., 2007). There is less reason to expect that small/new organizations would need large publicized internal CSR initiatives to promote change. In other words, these organizations should be established with a contemporary understanding of social issues in mind and have the flexibility to address these issues with relative ease. For this reason, external CSR messages may be most effective for novel brands because they highlight that these organizations understand the contemporary social context and are ready to contribute to positive social change in their external communities. Thus, we expect that external CSR messages will be more effective than internal CSR messages for novel versus legacy organizations Formally:

H2 : For a novel brand, purchase intention will be higher with an external CSR message than with an internal CSR message.

2.3.2. Authenticity

According to Pérez's (2019) theoretical model, congruency is key to CSR message authenticity and, in turn, consumer outcomes. Consistent with theorizing around authenticity (Morhat et al., 2015; Pérez, 2019) and congruency (Nadler & Tushman, 1980; Sung et al., 2022; Kim & Choi, 2018), it is likely that the effectiveness of internal and external CSR efforts will vary based on extrinsic brand cues and the mechanism underlying this interaction is perceived authenticity. Although long recognized as an important factor of successful marketing (Södergren, 2021) and essential to positive communication and persuasive outcomes (Carroll et al., 2022; Markovic et al., 2021; Kumar & Kaushik, 2022), authenticity is increasingly important to consider in the social media era (Campagna et al., 2021). When a social media message does not communicate authenticity, it is likely to backfire (Lopez-Quezada, 2018). Consumers face a proliferation of brands and brand messages on social media. To cut through these messages and identify with those that are meaningful (Alhouz & Hasouneh, 2020), consumers search for authenticity (Morhat et al., 2015). Spurred on by skeptical consumer reactions to "statements of solidarity" (CPA) without relevant action, companies are increasingly trying to leverage consumers' desire for authenticity. Brands large and small, new and old are employing messaging strategies that highlight their prosocial initiatives, both external and internal to the organization (Basil & Erlandson, 2008). Thus, it is of the utmost importance to understand how these increasingly popular CSR strategies are affected by company size to generate optimal brand outcomes.

There is no consensus on the definition of authenticity in the context of brand messages, but its Latin root implies a sense of trustworthiness (Bruhn et al., 2012). In the context of CSR messaging, extrapolating and paraphrasing from Pérez (2019), authenticity refers to one's feeling that information presented in CSR messaging reflects the real identity of the company in a sincere way. Pérez (2019) highlights that, while authenticity is similar to message credibility, credibility is distinguished from authenticity in terms of it referring to "believability." Consumers might believe a company's

messages, but if those messages do not address an issue they believe to be close to its core values, it will still lack authenticity. The lack of authenticity can vary based on extrinsic cues about the brand – what is known as the authenticity gap (Samuel et al., 2018). For example, CSR initiatives are more beneficial for sustainable fashion brands versus disposable fast fashion brands (Childs et al., 2019).

With the proliferation of brands and brand messages on social media and the increasing ease of consumers to engage with and share those brand messages, brand authenticity is essential for cutting through the clutter of meaningless commercialization (Campagna et al., 2021). Research has made it clear that authenticity is essential for positive communication and persuasive outcomes. Authenticity is associated with brand loyalty (Carroll et al., 2022), consumer engagement, brand usage intention, and willingness to pay a premium (Kumar & Kaushik, 2022). Other research indicates that the relationship between CSR and positive consumer outcomes is mediated by brand authenticity (Markovic et al., 2021), a notion supported by the model posited by Pérez (2019). For these reasons, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3: The interaction effects of extrinsic brand cues and CSR message type on purchase intention will be mediated by brand authenticity

2.3.3. Congruency

Based on research indicating that extrinsic cues affect how CSR messages are received (Robinson & Wood, 2018; Sung et al., 2022), we propose a similar effect when considering the effect of internal versus external CSR. Specifically, we expect that internal CSR will be most effective for legacy brands and least effective for novel brands, a proposition supported by extant literature on congruency (Sung et al., 2022; Nadler & Tushman, 1980, 1989). While there are many approaches to congruency, we rely on Pérez's (2019) theoretical framework explicating the effectiveness of CSR messaging and authenticity to develop hypotheses for two reasons: her model (1) pertains to CSR messaging, rather than CSR, in general, and (2) links congruency to authenticity. Specifically, Pérez (2019) positions CSR fit (or congruency) and social impact speci-

ficity (the extent to which a brand's contributions are deemed appropriate relative to size) as antecedents to CSR message authenticity and subsequent consumer outcomes. Fit is the perceived congruency between an organization and the social causes they become involved within their CSR efforts. Fit can be symbolic (company identity and issue fit) or functional (product and issue fit). Social impact specificity, on the other hand, refers to the relative effort and impact the CSR initiatives are perceived to make concerning the size and profits of the organization. In the present research we assess congruency as it relates to the organization and the issue, but also propose that extrinsic brand cues or age and size (e.g., in which social impact specificity would also vary) moderate this relationship.

Extant literature reveals the extent to which CSR fit and social impact specificity are essential to determining congruency. For example, Sung et al. (2022) demonstrated that congruency between brand size and issue proximity (local or national) was essential to increasing message credibility and positive attitudes toward the ad and brand. Specifically, the authors found that when brand size and issue proximity was consistent, participants experienced higher message credibility, which mediated attitudes toward the ad and the company. On the other hand, consumer responses tend to be negative when they perceive a low fit between the brand and the cause (Elving, 2013; Yoon et al., 2006). Congruency thus depends on perceptions of fit and extrinsic brand cues and is necessary for messages to feel authentic. More specifically, congruency will be an antecedent for CSR authenticity, which will subsequently lead to purchase intention (see Figure 1 for conceptual model):

H4: The interaction effects of extrinsic brand cues and CSR message type on purchase intention will be serially mediated by congruency and brand authenticity.

We test these hypotheses in the following set of studies that utilize common sustainable product categories of food (Yang et al., 2015) in Study 1, apparel (Kong et al., 2021) in Study 2, and water bottles (Kim et al., 2015) in Study 3. Because all consumers need to eat food, wear clothing, and drink water, we can assume some level of familiarity and

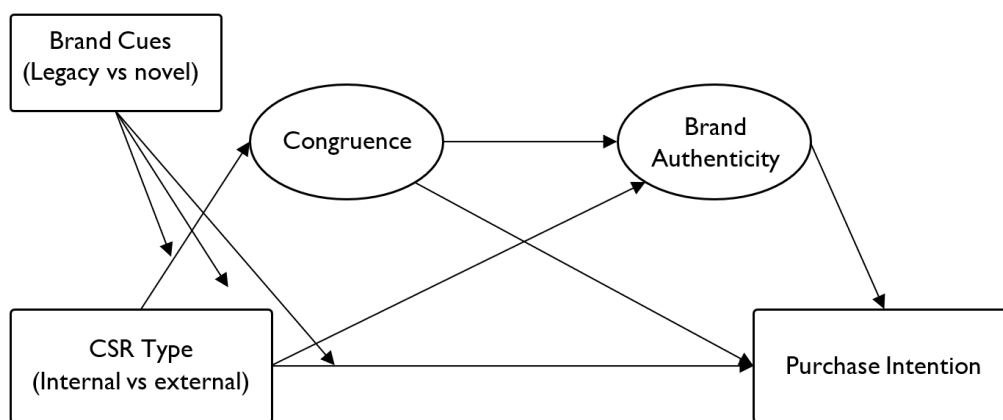


Figure 1. Conceptual model

involvement with these product categories (Haley & Pittman, 2022). Moreover, the frequency with which consumers purchase these goods (Vadicherla & Saravanan, 2014) means their production costs and eventual waste represent a fertile and active area for both the development of CSR strategy (Cantrell et al., 2015) and the education of consumers (Graça & Kharé, 2023). Study 1 examines the effect of one extrinsic brand cue (age: old vs. new) and types of CSR efforts advertised (internal or external CSR) on brand authenticity and subsequent purchase intention. Study 2 further tests our hypotheses, using age and size (large/old vs. small/new) as the extrinsic brand cue and a different product category and social cause. Study 3 confirms and extends the results of the first two studies, using the same brand cues as Study 2 but with a new product category and social cause. Study 3 confirms congruence and brand authenticity as sequential mechanisms for our overall proposed effect. We then discuss these studies considering their theoretical and managerial implications, and make suggestions for future research.

3. Issues Pretest

The pretest assessed consumer opinion of which social issues are most appropriate for brands to discuss on social media. We positioned this study in the context of social media platforms because brands most often distribute these messages through these channels (Sun & Wang, 2019; Voorveld, 2019). Participants were

recruited on MTurk ($n = 300$, $M_{age} = 35$, $SD_{age} = 9.5$, 63% male) and asked which social media they used and how often. Most participants reported using Instagram (78.3%), followed by Facebook (73.7%), Twitter (35.2%), and TikTok (5.3%). Thus, Instagram was chosen as the platform for all subsequent studies. Following Voorveld et al.'s (2018) design, for each platform they reported using, participants were asked a series of questions about its use. The primary question was about how appropriate it is (1=not at all appropriate, 7=very appropriate) for a brand to discuss each issue on that platform. Of the social issues brands might discuss on Instagram, participants rated education ($M=5.46$, $SD=1.43$), climate change ($M=5.35$, $SD=1.52$), and racial justice ($M=5.29$, $SD=1.40$) as the most appropriate, followed by gender equality ($M=5.24$, $SD=1.53$), reproductive rights ($M=5.12$, $SD=1.48$), immigration ($M=5.12$, $SD=1.48$), homelessness ($M=5.08$, $SD=1.55$), LGBTQ+ rights ($M=5.00$, $SD=1.63$), and gun control ($M=4.81$, $SD=1.73$). Therefore education, climate change, and racial justice were the social issues chosen for our three studies. The subsequent studies are positioned in the context of Instagram because it is believed to be the future of branded engagement on social media (Voorveld, 2019; see Table 1 for an empirical overview of all studies):

Table 1. Empirical Overview

Study (Social issue)	Independent Variables	Dependent Variables	Hypothesis Test				Key Finding
			H1	H2	H3	H4	
Study 1 (Sustainability)	• Brand Cues (new vs. old)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purchase intent • Brand authenticity 	-	+	+		Novel brands benefit from external CSR messaging
	• Message (internal vs. external)						
Study 2 (Racial justice)	• Brand Cues (new/small vs. old/big)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purchase intent • Brand authenticity 	+	+	+		Legacy (novel) brands benefit from internal (external) CSR messaging via authenticity
	• Message (internal vs. external vs. control)						
Study 3 (Education)	• Brand Cues (new/small vs. old/big)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purchase intent • Brand authenticity • Congruence 	-	+	+	+	Novel brands benefit from external CSR messaging via congruency then authenticity
	• Message (internal vs. external)						

4. Study I

To establish a baseline effect for how extrinsic brand cues moderate internal and external CSR, Study I focused on understanding how brand age (old vs. young) influences brand authenticity and subsequent purchase intention. We employed a between-subjects design to demonstrate the robustness of this effect using the social issue of climate change as determined in the pretest.

4.1. Method

4.1.1. Experimental design and sample

Study I explored age as an extrinsic brand cue to compare consumer response to an Instagram ad for an actual brand of sustainable dairy and farm products, Nancy's. A real brand was used in Study I to increase external validity. However, a relatively unknown brand was selected to avoid pre-existing consumer biases that could affect results beyond the manipulation. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2 (brand age: old vs. young) X 2 (CSR type: internal vs. external) between-subjects design.

4.1.2. Participants and design

We used MTurk to recruit North American participants with an active Instagram account who spoke English as a primary language. After removing one respondent for failing attention checks, our final sample size was 274 ($M_{age}=36$, $SD_{age}=9.9$, 61% male). Participants were paid \$0.76 and took an average of six minutes to complete the survey.

4.1.3. Stimuli development

The same image was used for all four conditions (see [Appendix A](#) for stimuli); only the caption was manipulated. The first line of the caption read, "since 1891, we have made the highest-quality, organic dairy products. Now we are pleased to announce a full range of dairy-free options as well." In the young brand condition, the date was changed to 1991. For the second line of the caption, the internal CSR condition read, "Nancy's is also committed to the planet, with 5% of all revenue being used to offset carbon emissions for all employees!" In the external CSR condition, the word "employees" (internal action) was changed to "customers" (external action). To develop distinct internal and external messaging we adopted strategy ideas from

real-world CSR campaigns, such as REI giving employees Black Friday off work and Google buying carbon offsets for employees. We then ran a separate pretest to check the CSR focus manipulation, and a chi-square test of independence examined the relation between "employee" and "customer" ads and the perception of effort as internal or external. The link between these variables was significant, $X^2(1, N = 127) = 6.707$, $p = .008$. For this and subsequent studies, the manipulated age of the brand was selected to represent an old ([Martin, 2017](#)) and a young ([Garelli, 2016](#)) company, respectively.

4.1.4. Procedure

Participants accessed the study link through MTurk and were directed to Qualtrics. After agreeing to informed consent, participants were asked to enter basic Instagram account information to increase ecological validity ([Pittman & Sheehan, 2020](#)). Participants then saw one of the four Instagram ads posted by Nancy's, passed an attention check, and then answered questions about the ads and the manipulation check.

4.1.5. Manipulation Check

After responding to dependent measures, participants rated the perceived age of the company ("Nancy's seems like a brand that is old and established"; all scales are [1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree] unless otherwise stated). The old brand was rated as older ($M=5.6$, $SD=1.1$) than the young brand ($M=5.2$, $SD=1.1$), confirming our age manipulation, $t(272)=2.273$, $p=.024$.

4.1.6. Measures

Purchase intent ($M=5.40$, $SD=1.43$) was measured using Till and Busler's (2000) three semantic differential items (unlikely/likely, definitely would not/definitely would, improbable/probable; $\alpha = .96$) in response to "How likely is it that you would consider purchasing a Nancy's product?" Brand authenticity ($M=5.70$, $SD=1.14$) was measured with a single item adapted from Cinelli and LeBoeuf (2019): "Nancy's seems like a brand that is authentic" (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree; all items 7-scale Likert unless otherwise stated). Single-item measures are appropriate for marketing research when consumers are familiar with the construct ([Bergkvist & Rossiter, 2007](#)). Brand

familiarity ($M=2.67$, $SD=4.2$; "How familiar are you with the brand Nancy's?", 1=not at all, 7=very familiar) was also used as a covariate. Participants reported age, gender, and household income, which were used as covariates in subsequent analyses.

4.2. Results and Discussion

4.2.1. Main Analyses

For purchase intent, a 2 (old brand vs. young brand) \times 2 (internal message vs. external message) ANOVA revealed a main effect of brand age ($F(1, 274) = 5.33$, $p = .022$, $M_{old}=5.1$, $SD_{old}=1.1$; $M_{young}=5.3$, $SD_{young}=1.4$) but no main effect of message type ($F(1, 274) = .236$, $p = .627$). A significant interaction effect emerged for purchase intention ($F(1, 274) = 6.09$, $p=.014$). Simple effect analysis results showed that for an older brand, the internal message led to only slightly higher purchase intention than the external message ($M_{internal}=5.77$ versus $M_{external}=5.47$; $F(1, 135) = 1.14$, $p = .12$). In contrast, when the brand was young, the external (compared to internal) message led to significantly more intention to purchase, ($M_{internal}=5.00$ versus $M_{external}=5.50$; $F(1, 135) = 3.69$, $p = .05$). Thus, H2 was supported, but not H1.

4.2.2. Indirect Effects

This experiment also tested brand authenticity as the mediator of the interaction effect on purchase intention. Using PROCESS (Hayes, 2020), we specified a moderated mediation model (model 7; 5,000 bootstrapped samples), treating message type as the predictor, brand age as the moderator, brand authenticity as the mediator, and purchase intent as the outcome. Results support our predictions via significant indexes of moderated mediation through authenticity (index = 0.436, $SE = 0.206$, $CI_{.95} = 0.048, 0.866$).

We predicted that consumers would respond more favorably to the old (young) brand when they used an external (internal) message, and that authenticity would mediate this relationship. We found partial support for these hypotheses. While there was an interaction of extrinsic brand cues and message type, and external messaging was more effective for young brands, there was no relationship between message types for old brands.

5. Study 2

Study 2 aimed to replicate the results of Study 1 using a different social cause (racial justice) and a more robust extrinsic brand cue manipulation (both size and age). To provide further insight into the effects of different messages, we tested an additional control condition where the brand simply expresses its support for a cause but does not commit to any action (a CPA message). Because much of the controversy surrounding woke-washing has revolved around brands' statements of support without corresponding action (Ritson, 2020; Hitt, 2020), it is important to compare this kind of message with internal and external messages that include different types of action. Thus, we pose another research question:

RQ1: Will a brand statement of support lead to different purchase intentions compared to internal or external messages?

5.1. Method

5.1.1. Experimental design and sample

Study 2 explored size and age as extrinsic brand cues to compare consumer response to an Instagram ad for another actual brand, Outland Denim. Participants were randomly assigned to one of six conditions in a 2 (brand type: legacy [old + big] vs. novel [young + small]) \times 3 (message: control statement vs. internal vs external) between-subjects design.

5.1.2. Participants and design

We used MTurk to recruit female North American participants with an active Instagram account who spoke English as a primary language. After removing one response for failing attention checks, our final sample size was 299 ($M_{age}=36$, $SD_{age}=11.8$). We recruited women for this study to gender-match product/brand with the participants, in line with previous research on Instagram advertising (Lee & Eastin, 2020). This is especially important for a product such as clothing (as opposed to water bottles and yogurt) because purchase intention for clothing is typically gender-dependent. Participants were paid \$0.76 and took an average of five and a half minutes to complete the survey.

5.1.3. Stimuli development

The same image was used for all conditions (see [Appendix B](#) for stimuli); only the captions were changed. For the brand manipulation, participants saw a single statement describing the brand as a precursor to seeing the post. The legacy (novel) brand condition read, "You are about to see a post from Outland Denim, an established company founded in 1919 (2019) with over 2,500 (only 25) employees." Next, for the message manipulation, participants saw a post, once again with the same image and only the caption was changed. The control statement read: "We firmly condemn all forms of hate and racism." The internal (external) message contained an additional sentence: "We are committing 5% of all revenue over the next 3 years to fund inclusion programs within our own company (external programs fighting racism)." We ran a separate pretest to check the CSR focus manipulation, and a chi-square test of independence examined the relationship between the "inclusion programs within our own company" and "external programs fighting racism" ads and the perception of effort as internal or external. The relation between these variables was significant in the expected direction, $\chi^2(1, N = 110) = 9.110, p = .002$.

5.1.4. Procedure

Participants accessed the study link through MTurk and were directed to Qualtrics, and the study proceeded like Study 1, this time with participants seeing one of the six Instagram ads posted by Outland.

5.1.5. Manipulation Check

Participants rated the size and age of the brand. The legacy brand was perceived as older ($M_{age}=5.5, SD_{age}=1.3$) than the novel brand ($M_{age}=3.1, SD_{age}=2.0; t(398)=14.02, p<.001$), as well as larger ($M_{size}=5.8, SD_{size}=1.3$) than the novel brand ($M_{size}=3.5, SD_{size}=2.0; t(398)=13.41, p<.001$), confirming our manipulations.

5.1.6. Measures

Purchase intent ($M=5.14, SD=1.48; \alpha = .96$) and brand authenticity ($M=5.39, SD=1.47$) were measured using the same items as Study 1. Participants gave their age, gender, and household income, which were used as covariates in subsequent analyses. Brand familiarity ($M=2.11, SD=1.8$; "How familiar are you with Outland

Denim?", 1=not at all, 7=very familiar) was also used as a covariate.

5.2. Results and Discussion

5.2.1. Main Analyses

For purchase intent, a 2 (legacy brand vs novel brand) \times 3 (control vs internal message vs external message) ANOVA revealed no main effects of brand type ($F(1, 298) = 1.33, p = .250, M_{legacy}=5.2, SD_{legacy}=1.5; M_{novel}=5.0, SD_{novel}=1.6$) or message type ($F(1, 298) = .088, p = .345, M_{control}=5.0, SD_{control}=1.5; M_{internal}=5.0, SD_{internal}=1.6; M_{external}=5.2, SD_{external}=1.5$). A significant interaction effect emerged for purchase intention ($F(1, 298) = 3.76, p=.025$). As [Figure 2](#) shows, simple effect analysis results showed that for a legacy brand, an internal message rather than an external message motivated greater intention to purchase ($M_{internal}=5.40$ versus $M_{external}=5.00; F(1, 98) = 1.35, p = .042$). In contrast, when the brand was novel, an external message rather than an internal message motivated greater intention to purchase, ($M_{internal}=4.60$ versus $M_{external}=5.50; F(1, 104) = 6.78, p = .011$). Thus, H1 and H2 were supported.

The first research question asked how a control statement would compare to internal and external messages. For a legacy brand, results for the control statement ($M=5.1, SD=1.7$) were not significantly different from either internal or external messages ($ps>.05$). For a novel brand, results for the control statement ($M=4.8, SD=1.4$) were also in between results for internal and external messages. While not significantly different from an internal message ($p > .05$), the control statement did generate significantly less purchase intention than an external message ($t(99)=-2.36, p = .02$).

5.2.2. Indirect Effects

We again tested brand authenticity as the mediator of the interaction effect on purchase intention. Using PROCESS ([Hayes, 2013](#)), we specified a moderated mediation model (model 7; 5,000 boot-strapped samples) treating CSR message type as the predictor, brand cues as the moderator, brand authenticity as the mediator, and purchase intent as the outcome. Results support our predictions via significant indexes of moderated mediation through authenticity (index = 1.035, SE = 0.337, CI_{.95} = 0.397, 1.700). Thus, H3 was supported.

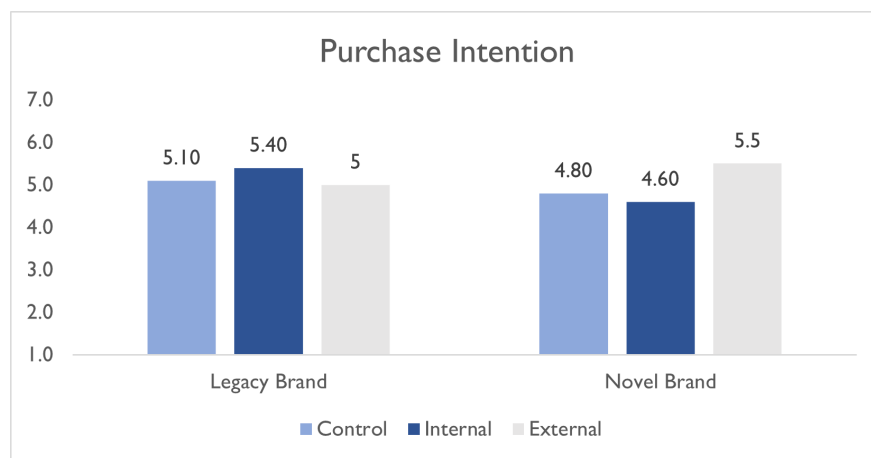


Figure 2. Study 2 purchase intention for legacy and novel brands using internal and external CSR message strategies

Study 2 further demonstrated our proposed interaction effects of brand cues and CSR message type (internal vs. external) on purchase intention. Instead of one or the other, we altered both size and age of the brand, and these more robust manipulations led to full support of the hypotheses. They are also more akin to what consumers will encounter in the real world where multiple brand cues and associations are brought to bear on each purchase decision (Erdem & Swait, 1998). The key mechanism in all these effects is brand authenticity. Participants perceive more authenticity when a legacy brand commits to changing itself internally, but they are more likely to perceive authenticity for a novel brand that partners with an external social cause or agency. Furthermore, Study 2 demonstrated that internal and external messaging were more effective for legacy and novel brands, respectively than a simple statement of support for an issue or cause. In contrast to internal or external CSR, the statement of support was not associated with authenticity, providing additional insight into the mechanism underlying the effectiveness of internal and external messages. Importantly, this study also demonstrates how the “wrong” type of CSR effort can be worse than a statement of support with no action at all.

6. Study 3

6.1. Method

A final experiment aimed to replicate the results of Studies 1 and 2 and extend the findings by offering support for H4. Study 3 again explored size and age as extrinsic brand cues to compare consumer responses to an Instagram ad for another actual brand, Takeya USA, whose ostensible CSR campaign was related to a different social cause (primary education). Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2 (brand type: legacy [old + big] vs. novel [young + small]) X 2 (message: internal vs. external) between-subjects design.

6.1.1. Participants and design

To allow for more robust data collection and maximize validity, we used a different survey response provider, Forthright, but with the same participant qualifications as Studies 1 and 2. After removing six responses for failing attention checks, our final sample size was 219 (50.7% female, $M_{age}=44$, $SD_{age}=16.4$). Participants were paid \$3.00 and took an average of just over six and a half minutes to complete the survey.

6.1.2. Stimuli development

The same image was used for all conditions (see Appendix C for stimuli); only the captions were changed. For the brand manipulation, participants saw a single statement with the same date and company

size numbers as previous studies. The legacy (novel) brand condition read, "You are about to see a post from Takeya USA, an established company founded in 1919 (2019) with over 2,500 (only 25) employees that makes water bottles." Next, for the message manipulation, participants saw a post, once again with the same image, and only the caption was changed. The internal message read: "We are excited about the new education trust we created to ensure that ALL OUR EMPLOYEES' children have access to a quality grade-school education!" The external message read: "We are excited to partner with The Education Trust, a non-profit committed to ensuring ALL children have access to a quality grade-school education!" A pretest confirmed the CSR focus manipulation, and a chi-square test confirmed the significance ($\chi^2(1, N = 119) = 4.892, p = .021$) of the relationship between the message about "employees' children" as internal and "all children" as external.

6.1.3. Measures

Purchase intent ($M=5.18, SD=1.48; \alpha = .96$), brand authenticity ($M=5.47, SD=1.30$), and brand familiarity ($M=1.95, SD=1.7$) were all measured using the same items as prior studies. This study tested congruence with the issue ($M=5.29, SD=1.34; \alpha = .78$) with two items from Farhat and Khan (2011): "Takeya USA and the issue of education fit well together," and "The issue of education is relevant for Takeya USA." Participants reported their age, gender, and household income, which were used as covariates in subsequent analyses.

6.2. Results and Discussion

6.2.1. Main Analyses

For purchase intent, a 2 (legacy brand vs. novel brand) \times 2 (internal message vs. external message) ANOVA revealed no main effects of brand type ($F(1, 218) = 0.28, p = .868, M_{\text{legacy}}=5.2, SD_{\text{legacy}}=1.8; M_{\text{novel}}=5.2, SD_{\text{novel}}=1.4$) or message type ($F(1, 218) = .682, p = .410, M_{\text{internal}}=5.1, SD_{\text{internal}}=1.4; M_{\text{external}}=5.3, SD_{\text{external}}=1.5$). A significant interaction effect emerged for purchase intention, $F(1, 218) = 4.76, p=.030$. Simple effect analysis results showed that for a legacy brand, an internal message rather than an external message did not motivate greater intention to pur-

chase ($M_{\text{internal}}=5.32$ versus $M_{\text{external}}=5.08; t(108) = .796, p = .214$) but trended in the expected direction. In contrast, when the brand was novel, an external message rather than an internal message motivated greater intention to purchase, ($M_{\text{internal}}=4.88$ versus $M_{\text{external}}=5.45; t(107) = -2.173, p = .016$). Thus, H2 was supported, but not H1.

In line with our findings from the first two studies, we expected authenticity to mediate the effect of CSR type and brand cues on purchase intention. A moderated mediation model (model 7; 5,000 boot-strapped samples) confirmed the moderated mediation effect, as the confidence interval excluded zero (index = .414, SE = 0.213, CI_{.95} = 0.030, 0.867), supporting H3.

Additionally, we expected this mediation to be serially mediated by congruence, such that individuals perceive a legacy (novel) brand as more congruent with an internal (external) message, leading to increased authenticity and subsequent purchase intention. We conducted a moderation mediation procedure with PROCESS model 85 to test the complete model (see Fig. 3). Moderated by external brand cues, the indirect effects of CSR type on purchase intent through congruence and authenticity (index = .222, SE = 0.10, CI_{.95} = 0.055, 0.423), supporting H4 (see Figure 3).

7. General Discussion

For corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts to be successful, brands must communicate their initiatives to the public, who in turn must perceive those initiatives as congruent and authentic. Contemporary consumers demand that brands take stances on social issues (O'Malley, 2019) and are more likely than ever to call out and chastise brands that engage in incongruent or inauthentic CSR initiatives (Ritson, 2020; Hitt, 2020). Because of this, it is important to investigate the impact of CSR messaging strategies on brand outcomes. Developing predictions based on Pérez's theoretical model of CSR message authenticity, our study investigated two types of CSR messaging strategies—internal and external—that precede congruence, authenticity, and purchase intent. Furthermore, answering Pérez' call to explore antecedents to message authenticity, extrinsic

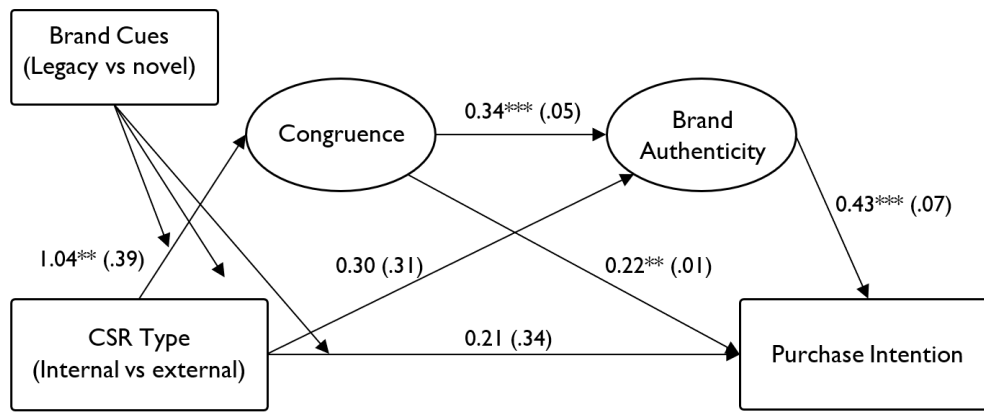


Figure 3. Study 3 moderated serial mediation model with unstandardized b coefficients (standard errors)
 ***p<.001, **p<.005

brand cues were examined as a moderator of CSR messaging strategies and congruence. Three experiments used different social causes (climate change, racial justice, and education) to reveal a consistent interaction between message type and extrinsic brand cue. Specifically, consumers were more receptive to external CSR messages from a novel (young and small) brand and somewhat more receptive to internal CSR messages from a legacy (old and large) brand. Congruence and authenticity mediated the effect of message type on purchase intentions, and extrinsic brand cues moderated this causal chain of effects.

Internal CSR led to optimal outcomes for legacy brands in Study 2 but not in Studies 1 or 3. We posit one explanation for this is that extrinsic cues associated with established brands are laden with ideas about the inability of these brands to change. Because of the effort required for legacy brands to change themselves, internal CSR initiatives may be perceived as requiring more work and long-term commitment for the organization compared to external CSR, which perhaps seems easier. This causes the issue to be perceived as more congruent with and authentic to the brand’s values. On the other hand, because legacy brands have been around for a long time, employ many people, and presumably make a lot of money, when they opt for the more conventional external CSR strategies, it is perceived as less congruent and less authentic, both of which lead to decreased purchase intentions.

These findings are consistent with research indicating that consumers view businesses’ spending and focus on external CSR efforts as incongruent with investment in product quality (Robinson & Wood, 2018). Our research highlights the importance of considering extrinsic brand cues in understanding the impact on congruency and authenticity on consumer response to CSR. It should be noted that the difference between internal and external CSR on purchase intention for old brands was not significant in Studies 1 and 3. Even with these relatively unknown brands, participants seem to have less malleable attitudes toward legacy brands than toward novel brands.

In contrast to legacy brands, novel brands are smaller and have less developed identities and values, so external CSR helps them align with certain causes in an authentic way. Internal CSR is less effective, perhaps because novel brands are expected to have developed in line with a contemporary understanding of social issues, so attempts to “reform” them would require substantially less effort. In other words, due to their increased ability to change and a still-evolving set of brand values, novel brands are expected to implement socially just initiatives from the beginning. Additionally, external CSR could also be viewed as riskier. Novel brands’ revenue stream is less stable than that of legacy brands, so any donation to external charities would thus be more meaningful. Consumers have no existing associations with new brands so

their attitudes are more malleable. Partnering with external causes can more easily establish congruence via a range of different types of CSR/brand "fit" (De Jong & Van Der Meer, 2017). Giving away a share of revenue may also serve as a positive signal to consumers (Erdem & Swait, 1998), which positively influences quality judgments for lesser-known brands.

7.1. Theoretical Implications

Our findings build on existing research in several ways. First, we provide insight into internal and external CSR messages, identifying mechanisms of their effectiveness and highlighting boundary conditions associated with extrinsic brand cues. From a theoretical standpoint, our research provides empirical support for the model of CSR message authenticity proposed by Pérez (2019). Consistent with the model, fit (congruency) and social impact specificity (extrinsic brand cues) served as antecedents to message authenticity, which in turn, predicts consumer outcomes (purchase intention). Specifically, we found that the impact of CSR messaging on purchase intention is serially mediated through perceptions of congruency and authenticity and that extrinsic brand cues – analogous to Pérez's (2019) notion of social impact specificity – moderate this effect. Our findings reveal that legacy (novel) brands generate greater ROI with internal (external) CSR. In this research, we support the proposed theoretical model of CSR messaging, reveal mechanisms of congruency and authenticity, and identify extrinsic brand cues as boundary conditions.

While Hawn and Ioannou (2016) initially showed that a discrepancy between internal and external CSR messages is correlated with lower market value, we take this one step further to empirically show how these different message types influence authenticity in different ways. Not only do these findings provide empirical support for Pérez's (2019) theoretical model of CSR message authenticity, but this research also extends the model by incorporating and examining two different types of CSR messages. Our findings indicate that the type of CSR message (i.e., internal versus external) needs to be considered in conjunction with congruency and extrinsic brand cues—cues that cause consumers to attribute very different motivations for

and perceptions of a company's CSR.

Attribution theory has been used to find antecedents for brand authenticity such as credibility, congruency/fit, uniqueness, consistency, and others (Moulard et al., 2016; Schallehn et al., 2014). Our findings add to this list by demonstrating that the direction of a CSR message (internal or external) and brand cues are two more factors that are important authenticity antecedents. In particular, research for legacy brands on how to conduct authentic CSR is scant, but the present study demonstrates how internal CSR messages benefit these brands. Because consumers crave authenticity (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010), a legacy brand willing to correct its own failings may communicate a greater passion for the salient issue (Moulard et al., 2016) thus making it more attractive.

Similarly, our findings help close the "authenticity gap" wherein similar CSR efforts do not resonate equally for different brands based on factors inherent to the brand or product (Childs et al., 2019; Samuel et al., 2018). For legacy brands, corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts aimed at external social change may be perceived as inappropriate and inauthentic. Internal CSR efforts, or those aimed at change within the company itself, may instead be more effective (Robinson & Wood, 2018). Extrinsic cues such as the brand's age and size contribute to this authenticity gap and the corresponding discrepancy between internal and external CSR (Hawn & Ioannou, 2016). These extrinsic cues also serve as a metric by which to evaluate the contribution or impact of the CSR efforts relative to the profits of the organization (Pérez, 2019). For a hundred-year-old company that employs thousands of workers, it's relatively easy to give to an external cause—in fact, it's probably expected. Similarly, for a new start-up with three employees, it is also not very noteworthy to announce any socially conscious internal company values; this, too, is expected. The company's age and size are cues that dictate to consumers what kind of CSR action is more authentic (Sung et al., 2022; Till & Nowak, 2000; Zhang et al., 2019).

The present study also extends research on

intrinsic versus extrinsic causal attributions of CSR communication (Heider, 1944). Our findings explicate how the direction of the CSR initiatives may be helped or hindered by extrinsic brand cues that can help align brand identity with behavior (Alhouz & Hasouneh, 2020; Haski-Leventhal et al., 2017) in the minds of consumers. When they encounter CSR, consumers will typically attribute some combination of extrinsic motivation (increased reputation, profit) and intrinsic motivation (congruent with core values;) (Gosselt et al., 2019). Whereas intrinsic motives have a greater link with brand success (Parguel et al., 2011), extrinsic motives are more associated with negative consumer attitudes (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Mohr et al., 1998). For legacy brands, this makes internal CSR even more appealing, because in the absence of explicit external motivation, consumers will likely attribute internal motivation (Li et al., 2019) to their internal activity.

Future studies on CSR congruency and authenticity should consider other brand cues, such as market share, positioning, branding, and partnerships, which may moderate consumer perception of different CSR message strategies. Moreover, the consumer decision-making process is a journey (Haley & Pittman, 2022), and these cues may vary in importance over the course of the consumer/brand relationship (Gupta et al., 2021). CSR authenticity is directly linked to brand authenticity, and both directly lead to increased brand loyalty (Safeer & Liu, 2023), so a consumer's relationship and history with a brand may further moderate the efficacy of internal and external CSR messaging.

7.2. Managerial Implications

In terms of practical implications, it is important to note that internal and external CSR messages are not one-size-fits-all solutions. Rather, brands should consider how their age and size might serve as cues when determining which messaging strategies will be most effective with consumers. Novel brands, or those that are small or young, should consider partnering with external organizations to engage in CSR efforts and corresponding messaging. For these brands, engaging with relevant external partnerships or opportunities will be received more favorably than focusing on inter-

nal CSR efforts. Importantly, messaging that highlights these external CSR efforts will be perceived as more congruent with the brands extrinsic cues and thus be more authentic than internal CSR efforts. In turn, this increased authenticity should promote a positive consumer response.

On the other hand, legacy brands that are large and old should aim their CSR efforts internally to increase congruency and authenticity. For example, tech giant Google is known for its programs and office culture that make employees' lives more enjoyable, and long-time athletic mainstay Adidas recently drastically cut down on its employees' water usage and waste in the office (Wolf, 2023). Legacy brands should develop internal CSR initiatives (and the corresponding messaging to let everyone know) to increase positive consumer response since consumers will perceive them as more authentic than if they use the traditional external alternatives.

This builds on Alhouti et al. (2016) notion of how reparation influences authenticity. Reparation has to do with the way a company attempts to rectify any associated wrongs. Reparation is seen as authentic when the brand "addresses a previous misdeed in a responsible manner and puts in place preventative measures to make sure the incident does not occur again" (Alhouti et al., 2016, p. 1244). To this, we would add the notion that organizational characteristics need to be considered when planning CSR strategies, and legacy brands in particular should consider internal CSR as a way to authentically repair their reputation after any wrongdoing.

On the other hand, engagement in external CSR for legacy brands may be perceived as diverting attention away from the real issues that these organizations face by investing resources in unrelated issues. Because they have no history or reputation of being involved in these areas, consumers perceive a lack of credibility (Milfeld & Haley, 2023), which translates to negative brand outcomes. For example, oil companies like BP and Shell spend thousands of dollars touting their sustainability plans to transition to clean energy (Lewton, 2022), but consumer backlash persists because of the companies' record profits (Ferris, 2023) and continued investment

in and plans for fossil fuels (Carrington, 2022). Because our study reveals that consumers' responses to brands' CSR efforts are more positive when these efforts focus on addressing issues internal to these legacy organizations. It is possible that internal CSR could save firms money because donating millions to an external cause may be less likely to generate equity than spending a fraction of the same amount on internal measures. In sum, a brand that fails to align itself with the optimal CSR type will risk consumers attributing its CSR activity to an unethical desire for profit or that it is inauthentically "washing" itself with incongruent issues or values (Ginder et al., 2021).

8. Limitations and Future Directions

All studies have limitations and this one is no exception. First, it should be noted that we manipulated extrinsic brand cues through statements about size and age rather than comparing large/old brands to new/small brands. Instead, we used existing, but mostly unknown, brands as stimuli in a between-subjects design and controlled for brand familiarity. This decision was made to enhance experimental control and to avoid extraneous cognitions (unrelated to the manipulations) that inevitably accompany legacy brands. Real-world CSR messages come from brands with many more corresponding cues than can be measured in a single study. Correspondingly, brand perceptions are complex and based on more than perceptions of brand age and size. Furthermore, real CSR messages may not fall neatly into categories of "internal" or "external," and future studies should investigate how consumers perceive the ratio or overlap of different strategies. As noted in the introduction, brands often release these statements in cluttered social media environments. The extent to which social media users would pay attention to/notice such messages in their social media feed was not accurately simulated in this research. Instead, we investigated the effects of these messages without considering the context. Future research should investigate the effect of internal and external CSR messages in a more ecologically valid setting and account for other potential moderators such as issue involvement (Haley & Pittman, 2022) or consumer attributions (Marín et al., 2016).

This research investigated how extrinsic brand cues of age and size interact with CSR message type (internal and external) to impact consumer response. Overall, external CSR was more effective for legacy (large/old) brands, while internal CSR was more effective for novel (small/new) brands. Our research is the among the first to provide evidence for this intersection. Furthermore, we explicate congruency and authenticity as mechanisms underlying this relationship. In doing so, we support and extend Pérez's (2019) model of CSR message authenticity and provide recommendations for organizations to engage in authentic CSR practices.

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Appendix A. Study I Stimuli

	Internal	External
Young	 <p>nancysyogurt ...</p> <p>Nancysyogurt Since 2001 we have made the highest-quality, organic dairy products. Now we are pleased to announce a full range of dairy-free options as well.</p> <p>Nancy's is also committed to the planet, with 5% of all revenue being used to offset carbon emissions for all employees!</p>	 <p>nancysyogurt ...</p> <p>Nancysyogurt Since 2001 we have made the highest-quality, organic dairy products. Now we are pleased to announce a full range of dairy-free options as well.</p> <p>Nancy's is also committed to the planet, with 5% of all revenue being used to offset carbon emissions for all customers!</p>
Old	 <p>nancysyogurt ...</p> <p>Nancysyogurt Since 1891 we have made the highest-quality, organic dairy products. Now we are pleased to announce a full range of dairy-free options as well.</p> <p>Nancy's is also committed to the planet, with 5% of all revenue being used to offset carbon emissions for all employees!</p>	 <p>nancysyogurt ...</p> <p>Nancysyogurt Since 1891 we have made the highest-quality, organic dairy products. Now we are pleased to announce a full range of dairy-free options as well.</p> <p>Nancy's is also committed to the planet, with 5% of all revenue being used to offset carbon emissions for all customers!</p>

Appendix B. Study 2 Stimuli

Control



Outlanddenim
We firmly condemn all forms of hate and racism.

Internal



Outlanddenim
We firmly condemn all forms of hate and racism.
We are committing 5% of all revenue over the next 3 years to fund inclusion programs within our own company.

External



Outlanddenim
We firmly condemn all forms of hate and racism.
We are committing 5% of all revenue over the next 3 years to fund external programs fighting racism.

Appendix C. Study 3 Stimuli

Internal

External



takeyausa

208 likes

TakeyaUsa We are excited to partner with The Education Trust, a non-profit committed to making sure ALL our employees' children have access to a safe and quality grade-school education!




takeyausa

208 likes

TakeyaUsa We are excited to partner with The Education Trust, a non-profit committed to making sure ALL American children have access to a safe and quality grade-school education!



LUMINOUS INSIGHTS

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