Since January 2020 Elsevier has created a COVID-19 resource centre with free information in English and Mandarin on the novel coronavirus COVID-19. The COVID-19 resource centre is hosted on Elsevier Connect, the company's public news and information website.

Elsevier hereby grants permission to make all its COVID-19-related research that is available on the COVID-19 resource centre - including this research content - immediately available in PubMed Central and other publicly funded repositories, such as the WHO COVID database with rights for unrestricted research re-use and analyses in any form or by any means with acknowledgement of the original source. These permissions are granted for free by Elsevier for as long as the COVID-19 resource centre remains active.
Promoting corporate social responsibility message in COVID-19 advertising: How threat persuasion affects consumer responses to altruistic versus strategic CSR

Quan Xie a,*, Tianjiao (Grace) Wang b

a Temerlin Advertising Institute, Meadows School of the Arts, Southern Methodist University, PO Box 750113, Dallas, TX 75275, USA
b Department of Communication, Slane College of Communications and Fine Arts, Bradley University, 1501 W Bradley Avenue, Peoria, IL 61625, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
CSR appeal
Threat intensity
Message credibility
CSR skepticism
Warmth

ABSTRACT

Given the challenges facing companies in communicating corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives amid the pandemic, this study focuses on the effects of CSR appeals in COVID-19 advertising. Using the Ordered Protection Motivation model and CSR literature as the foundation, this study examined the interaction effect between CSR appeal (altruistic CSR vs. strategic CSR) and threat intensity (low vs. high) of the crisis depiction featured in the ad on consumers’ responses. Results revealed the moderating role of threat intensity on the relationships between CSR appeal and consumers’ responses, such that altruistic CSR appeal outperformed strategic CSR appeal when consumers were exposed to an ad featuring a high-threat crisis depiction, whereas the two appeals yielded similar effects when the ad featured a low-threat crisis depiction. In particular, altruistic CSR appeal (vs. strategic CSR appeal) generated greater message credibility, stronger feelings of warmth, and lower CSR skepticism, resulting in more favorable ad and brand attitudes and stronger purchase intentions, but only in the high threat condition.

1. Introduction

The public health and economic crises created by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic are driving significant changes in consumer behavior, including an increase in socially conscious spending habits. A report by Edelman indicated that 89% of consumers believed companies should play a positive role in helping people meet pandemic-related challenges (Edelman, 2020). Another survey revealed that 78% of consumers required companies to offer help, even in the post-pandemic world (Talkwalker, 2021). These changing consumer expectations have urged companies to operate with a strong social conscience. Hence, the pandemic presents companies with an unprecedented opportunity to shift towards genuine CSR (He & Harris, 2020). This shift warrants academic study on the effects of diverse types of CSR appeals.

Extant literature has examined the effects of various CSR appeals in advertising, such as collectivism-oriented/individualism-oriented appeals (e.g., Lee & Haley, 2019), hope appeals (e.g., Kim et al., 2012), and help-self/help-other benefit appeals (e.g., Wei & Jung, 2021; Zhao & Lee, 2019), and reveal that CSR appeals help boost ad effectiveness (e.g., Diehl et al., 2016; Orazi et al., 2016). In these studies, the CSR appeals examined primarily focused on the message characteristics, such as the benefits perceived by consumers—whether a CSR initiative satisfies consumers’ self-interest or the well-being of others. However, few studies have captured how different CSR types, when serving as ad appeals, impact the consumer response. Schaefer et al. (2019, 2020) studied employees’ exposure to corporate ads of four CSR types (customer-oriented, employee-oriented, environment-oriented, and philanthropy-oriented CSR) and investigated employees’ perceived CSR authenticity and the organization’s CSR engagement. However, these two studies did not examine the direct effects of CSR types on consumers’ attitudinal and behavioral responses.

In this vein, the present research extends Schaefer et al.’s (2019, 2020) research by examining how different CSR type appeals generate favorable consumer responses. Amid the pandemic, brands have adopted various CSR appeals in advertising. For instance, Frito-Lay, Budweiser, and Coca-Cola embraced the altruistic initiative (altruistic CSR) in their advertising to discuss corporate charitable giving and their work in local communities. Meanwhile, brands like IKEA and Acura focused on strategic social responsibility activities (strategic CSR) where they showed both care for their customer and a productive bottom line for

* Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: quanxie@smu.edu, qxie01@yahoo.com (Q. Xie), twang@fsmail.bradley.edu (T.(G. Wang).

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.04.073
Received 21 September 2021; Received in revised form 21 April 2022; Accepted 30 April 2022
Available online 8 May 2022
0148-2963/© 2022 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.
the company—most often communicated in the form of consumer rewards programs. Limited research has yet to examine how consumers respond to these two CSR appeals in a global health crisis.

Another unique characteristic of COVID-19 ads is that they inevitably involve representations of the ongoing crisis and its impact on the public (e.g., lockdowns and loss of life). Hence, these crisis depictions contain varying levels of threat information. According to Schimmack (2005), when people perceive a high threat level, the increase in fear requires more cognitive capacity to process the threat information. As such, consumers may process altruistic and strategic CSR appeals differently depending on the level of crisis threat depiction (low vs. high) in the ad. Previous research has not yet examined the interaction effect between CSR appeal and threat intensity of the crisis depiction on ad evaluations and behavioral intentions.

To address these gaps, the present study seeks to expand the conceptual model of CSR advertising to the context of a global public health crisis (i.e., the COVID-19 pandemic). Guided by the Ordered Protection Motivation Model and CSR literature, this study examined the effects of COVID-19 ads with different CSR appeals (altruistic CSR vs. strategic CSR) and varying levels of crisis threat depiction (low vs. high) on message credibility, CSR skepticism, warmth, ad and brand attitudes, and purchase intentions. Per this interaction effect, we proposed an integrative framework. As such, our research contends that a proper combination of CSR appeal and crisis threat depiction enhances ad responses.

The present work offers three significant contributions. First, we integrated the threat persuasion theory and CSR literature to reveal how crisis threat depiction intertwines with the effects of two specific CSR appeals (altruistic CSR vs. strategic CSR) on ad/brand evaluations and purchase intentions. The results advance our knowledge about the boundary conditions under which CSR appeals generate optimal ad responses. Second, we unveiled the mediating roles of message credibility, CSR skepticism, and warmth in the relationship between CSR appeal and ad responses, which advanced the understanding of CSR advertising effects by adding to the cognitive and affective perspectives. Third, this study offers practical implications to the marketing industry to determine the optimal combination of CSR appeal and crisis threat depiction that boosts ad responses amid a public health crisis.

2. Literature review

2.1. CSR appeals

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) refers to a company’s initiatives that promote societal well-being to extend beyond its immediate financial interests and legal requirements (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001). It has evolved into an integral part of business operations (Baskentli et al., 2019; Brown & Dacin, 1997; Mochales & Blanch, 2021). Previous CSR literature has developed diverse typologies of CSR to serve different research purposes. For example, Husted and De Jesus Salazar (2006) identified CSR types focusing on altruism, enforced egoism, and strategic intent, based on the company’s motivation to undertake CSR efforts. Kim et al. (2018) proposed symbolic CSR (i.e., ethical codes and organizational credibility) and practical CSR (i.e., philanthropic contribution and resource accommodation) to investigate stakeholder influences. And Rim and Ferguson (2020) explored proactive and reactive CSR based on the idea that companies can be at different stages in launching CSR initiatives.

However, the most well-known and classic categorization of CSR types was developed by Carroll (1991), suggesting that corporations’ CSR activities have four domains: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic (Carroll, 2016). Lantos (2001) extended Carroll’s (1991) typology and proposed a similar classification as ethical, altruistic, and strategic CSRs, which has been widely adopted by recent CSR research (Nave & Ferreira, 2019). Herein ethical CSR refers to a company’s responsibilities to fulfill its ethical duties to avoid social harms, rather than promote social good (Lantos, 2001). It is thus rarely used as an ad appeal and not included in this study. Similarly, legal CSR refers to the company’s social responsibilities to comply with laws and regulations (Carroll, 1991), and it is also seldom promoted as an ad appeal.

Altruistic (humanitarian, philanthropic) CSR is equivalent to Carroll’s (1991) philanthropic responsibilities. This type refers to the corporate activities that contribute to the betterment of society, regardless of whether the firm will financially benefit from the initiative (Chen et al., 2018; Nave & Ferreira, 2019). An example of altruistic CSR would be a company providing job training for the unemployed with no guarantee that these trainees will become productive employees later, or even end up working for the company (Lantos, 2001). In this vein, altruistic CSR includes the actions intended to enhance society’s welfare and therefore connects core corporate competencies to societal needs (Jankova, 2008; Lantos, 2001). Altruistic CSR appeal advocates these philanthropic activities, such as charitable giving, community service programs, environmentally friendly policies, and various quality-of-life efforts (Lantos, 2001). In COVID-19 advertising, the corporate ads advocating a company’s charity programs, donations, and giving back to those in need are considered to convey altruistic CSR appeal (Kim & Ji, 2021). One relevant example is Frito-Lay’s “It’s About People” campaign that communicated the company’s efforts of donating $15 million to relief efforts (Beer, 2020).

Strategic CSR aims to accomplish strategic business goals, with which companies do good as they believe it to be in their best financial interests (Lantos, 2001; Nave & Ferreira, 2019). In other words, it is philanthropy aligned with profit motives (i.e., corporate sales goals) (Nave & Ferreira, 2019; Quster & Thompson, 2001). Strategic CSR appeal promotes CSR initiatives with a clear business-serving motive (Kim & Ji, 2021). For example, during the pandemic, the online food ordering platform, Grubhub, launched a CSR program to protect local restaurants. It contributed $85 million to drive orders to local restaurants via coupon deals and increased advertising (Grubhub, 2020). For consumers, it was explicit that this program helped achieve Grubhub’s financial goals beyond the support of local restaurants. Hence, in COVID-19 advertising, strategic CSR appeal is usually communicated in the form of customer rewards or incentive programs.

The primary difference between altruistic and strategic CSRs is highlighted in the corporate motives. For strategic CSR, it is believed that investment into a good cause will yield positive financial returns, whereas this is not the motive for altruistic CSR (although the company may conceivably benefit as a byproduct) (Kim & Ji, 2021; Lantos, 2001). Notably, the attributions that people make about the motive of a company’s CSR activities play a crucial role in differentiating altruistic CSR and strategic CSR (Kim & Ji, 2021; Miller & Lellis, 2015). According to the discounting principle, if there is a solid and obvious explanation for an effect, individuals will disregard other possible factors as irrelevant (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Kelley, 1973). Hence, although consumers may simultaneously attribute strategic and altruistic motives to a CSR activity, they will still discount the effect of one of them if they feel the other to be dominant. That said, in COVID-19 advertising, if an ad carries a strong altruistic CSR appeal, consumers will be most likely to attribute altruistic motives to the company’s action and vice versa. Therefore, it is essential to understand the effects of altruistic and strategic CSR appeals, given that consumers are likely to perceive a particular type of CSR motive if such CSR appeal is explicitly presented. Taken together in the context of COVID-19 advertising, this study intended to explore the effects of altruistic and strategic CSR appeals on ad outcomes and how these effects can be moderated by another critical message trait—threat intensity of the crisis depiction.

2.2. The moderating role of threat intensity

Threat information remains a crucial determinant of message effectiveness in advertising (Brennan & Binney, 2010; Mostafa, 2020; Yoon & Tinkham, 2013). Threat persuasion, also referred to as fear appeal, is
often employed for issues that have severe consequences for the public (e.g., not wearing masks increases the chance of catching COVID-19) and thus can motivate behavior change (e.g., wearing masks) to reduce the risks of threat (Witte, 1992; Rogers, 1985).

Increasing threat information, or threat intensity, can influence information processing and affective responses (Dickinson & Holmes, 2008). For example, Mostafa (2020) finds that fear imagery in advertising elicits increased brain processing. Threat intensity refers to “the level of severity the threat information carries” (Yoon & Tinkham, 2013, p. 35). As threat intensity rises from low to high, people’s perceived negativity will increase, leading to an increase in fear and requiring more cognitive capacity to process the threat information (Schimmack, 2005). Extant literature has considered threat intensity as an important predictor of threat message persuasiveness (Dillard & Anderson, 2004) and explored its interaction effects with other message traits (e.g., humor, threat type) and individual difference variables (e.g., sensation seeking, need for cognition), as well as its impact on emotional and coping responses (e.g., Dickinson & Holmes, 2008; Yoon & Tinkham, 2013; Yoon & Mayer, 2014). However, no previous research has examined the moderating role of threat intensity on the effects of CSR appeals.

As such, this study is interested in exploring how threat intensity of the crisis depiction in COVID-19 advertising moderates the effects of CSR appeals. Notably, we did not intend to study how threat information can alter individuals’ health behaviors related to COVID-19. Given that the threat information (conveyed by the crisis depictions in COVID-19 ads) can affect information processing and emotional reactions to the CSR appeal, the crisis threat depiction serves as an ad message trait. Therefore, we are interested in studying the interaction effect between CSR appeals and crisis threat depiction (threat intensity) on consumers’ ad/brand evaluations and purchase intentions to COVID-19 ads.

According to the Ordered Protection Motivation (OPM) model (Tanner et al., 1991), when people face a threat, their primary response is threat appraisal, through which they evaluate the severity of the threat and the probability that it will occur. They then enter a period of coping appraisal when they process the solution to the threat. That said, people feel fear first, which motivates them to seek solutions later. Given this sequential order, a certain level of threat perception needs to be present for people to enter coping appraisal (Yoon & Mayer, 2014). In particular, if a perceived threat is adequately high, people are likely to enter coping appraisal and elaborate on both the threat and solution. However, if a perceived threat is too intense, fear control may occur, and people then tend to avoid/counterargue the threat message, as well as to turn away from further elaborating the solution (Yoon & Mayer, 2014). Similarly, if a perceived threat is too low, this low negative information is not imposing enough to require significant cognitive processing. Therefore, people will also not elaborate on the threat and solution (Yoon & Tinkham, 2013).

In COVID-19 advertising, we propose that when a corporate ad includes a low-threat crisis depiction, CSR appeal has no significant impact on consumer responses. This is because, in the low threat condition, consumers tend to have a low perceived threat that will not require substantial information processing. Therefore, they will not scrutinize the threat information and the CSR message (i.e., the solution) but focus more on the surface cues. As both altruistic and strategic CSR appeals involve cues indicating the company’s CSR purpose, consumers may yield similar responses to these two appeals.

**H1:** When a low-threat crisis depiction is included in the ad, there is no significant impact of CSR appeal on (a) ad attitudes, (b) brand attitudes, and (c) purchase intentions.

However, when a corporate ad includes a high-threat crisis depiction, altruistic CSR appeal may generate better ad responses than strategic CSR appeal. This is because when the ad presents a sufficient high threat in depicting the crisis, this threat information becomes unpleasant and requires great elaboration of both the threat and solution (Schimmack, 2005). Consumers will then engage in systematic processing to scrutinize the CSR message (i.e., the solution) and thus are likely to recognize the public-serving motive of the altruistic CSR appeal and the business-serving motive behind the strategic CSR appeal. Subsequently, they may yield more favorable evaluations toward the altruistic CSR appeal than the strategic CSR appeal.

**H2:** When a high-threat crisis depiction is included in the ad, altruistic CSR appeal generates (a) more favorable ad attitudes, (b) better brand attitudes, and (c) greater purchase intentions than strategic CSR appeal.

### 2.3. Message credibility and CSR skepticism

**Message credibility** is defined as the degree to which an individual perceives a message to be accurate, trustworthy, and believable (Flanagan & Metzger, 2000). It is a cognitive evaluation that plays a critical role in the effectiveness of persuasion attempts (Eisen & Tarrahi, 2016). Similarly, **skepticism** is also a cognitive evaluation that refers to a tendency to doubt, question, and disbelieve (Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013). Although skepticism conceptually relates to low credibility, the two concepts focus on different aspects. Credibility is a positive expectation of a partner’s beneficial conduct, whereas skepticism indicates an individual’s active expectation that the other party will violate their welfare and security (Cho, 2006). Both concepts are adopted in this study to provide a comprehensive understanding of consumers’ cognitive responses toward CSR appeals, including their (1) perceived credibility of the CSR appeal (message credibility) and (2) perceived skepticism toward the company’s commitment to CSR (CSR skepticism).

In COVID-19 advertising, when exposed to an ad with a low threat level, people generate low perceived negativity and thus have insufficient motivations to judge the trustworthiness of CSR appeal (Metzger, 2007). In this vein, they tend to rely on the heuristic credibility cues to assess information credibility (Metzger, 2007). As both altruistic and strategic CSR appeals describe the brand’s CSR initiatives (Lantos, 2001), consumers are likely to consider them similar in message credibility and perceived CSR skepticism. However, when consumers are exposed to an ad with a high threat level, their perceived negativity will increase, resulting in stronger motivations to judge the information credibility (Metzger, 2007). In this case, they will scrutinize the CSR message and recognize the self-interest motive of a strategic CSR appeal and the other-interest nature of an altruistic CSR appeal. Therefore, consumers may perceive the altruistic CSR appeal as more credible than the strategic CSR appeal and have less skepticism about the company. Hence, we proposed H3 and H4.

**H3:** When a low-threat crisis depiction is included in the ad, CSR appeal has no significant impact on message credibility. When a high-threat crisis depiction is included, altruistic CSR appeal generates higher message credibility than strategic CSR appeal.

**H4:** When a low-threat crisis depiction is included in the ad, CSR appeal has no significant impact on CSR skepticism. When a high-threat crisis depiction is included, altruistic CSR appeal generates lower CSR skepticism than strategic CSR appeal.

Moreover, prior literature suggests that exposure to various CSR appeals enhances message trustworthiness (Fernández et al., 2021). Also, Eberle et al. (2013) found that the credibility of CSR communication positively affected the brand reputation and WOM intentions. Given these findings, we assume message credibility may mediate the effects of CSR appeal on ad attitudes, brand attitudes, and purchase intentions, especially in the high threat condition where people are motivated to scrutinize ad messages.

**H5:** Message credibility will mediate the effects of CSR appeal on (a) ad attitudes, (b) brand attitudes, and (c) purchase intentions, but only in the high threat condition.
Furthermore, CSR appeal has been found to influence consumer skepticism. For example, Kim (2014) determined that a vigorously promoted CSR initiative increased consumer skepticism, negatively impacting purchase intentions, brand equity, and WOM intentions. Additionally, Romani et al. (2016) found that CSR skepticism mediated the relationship between perceived company CSR motives and behavioral responses. Hence, we posit that, when consumers scrutinize the CSR message (i.e., in the high threat condition), their perceived CSR skepticism will mediate the effects of CSR appeal on ad/brand attitudes and purchase intentions. Otherwise, CSR skepticism will not mediate this relationship.

**H6:** CSR skepticism will mediate the effects of CSR appeal on (a) ad attitudes, (b) brand attitudes, and (c) purchase intentions, but only in the high threat condition.

### 2.4. **Warmth**

When consumers are exposed to COVID-19 ads, the feelings of warmth induced by the ad also play a vital role in the effect of CSR appeal on ad evaluations. Warmth is a positive, mild, and volatile emotion triggered by “the direct or vicarious experience of a love, family, or friendship relationship” (Aaker et al., 1986, p.366). It captures traits such as being caring or helpful (Cuddy et al., 2008). Since a company’s CSR activities represent its moral values in advancing social well-being (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001), these initiatives can be regarded as caring (Bolton & Mattila, 2015). Hence, a company’s engagement in CSR induces inferences of warmth. In this study, we argue that consumers’ feelings of warmth toward a company stem from the perception of the company’s CSR motives. That said, the type of motives, altruistic or strategic, behind the CSR activity may affect the warmth inferred.

When threat intensity increases, consumers will generate stronger fears toward the crisis depiction in COVID-19 ads. As the CSR literature indicates, altruistic CSR results in positive emotions (García-De los Salmones and Perez, 2018). Hence, the positive feelings induced by altruistic CSR may neutralize consumers’ negative feelings about the threat (Du et al., 2010). In this vein, the altruistic CSR appeal leads to stronger feelings of warmth than the strategic CSR appeal in the high threat condition. On the other hand, in the low threat condition, the strategic CSR appeal generates stronger feelings of warmth than strategic CSR, resulting in more favorable ad/brand attitudes and stronger purchase intentions, but only in the high threat condition (H8). Fig. 1 presents the proposed conceptual model with all the hypotheses.

**H8:** Warmth will mediate the effects of CSR appeal on (a) ad attitude, (b) brand attitude, and (c) purchase intention, but only in the high threat condition.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. **Design, participants, and procedure**

The study employed a 2 (CSR appeal: altruistic CSR vs. strategic CSR) × 2 (crisis threat depiction: low vs. high) between-subjects factorial design. A total of 476 participants who reside in the US were recruited from Amazon Mechanic Turk (MTurk). After eliminating those who did not pass quality checks and attention check questions, 436 participants were entered for final analysis (M\(_{\text{age}}\) = 39.67, SD = 12.35, 58.9% Male, 64% White).

In the online experiment, participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions. Under each condition, they first reported their general attitudes toward companies’ CSR activities, prior perceived threat of COVID-19, and knowledge of COVID-19. They were then directed to view a stimulus ad. Next, they answered questions about message credibility, warmth, CSR skepticism, ad attitude, brand attitude, purchase intention, manipulation check, and demographic questions. Upon completion, they were debriefed, thanked, and compensated. Three pretests were conducted to create the stimulus ads.

#### 3.2. **Pretest 1 on threat message selection**

We adopted Schoenbachler and Whittler’s (1996) practice of using imagery to manipulate crisis threat depiction to heighten the ecological validity. Therefore, Pretest 1 aimed to select two pictures representing a high threat level and a low threat level, respectively. We first searched online to identify nine pictures depicting the crisis scenes of the COVID-19 pandemic. All nine scenes have been used in the existing COVID-19 ads. We recruited a total of 295 participants from MTurk (M\(_{\text{age}}\) = 36.10, SD = 10.86, 62% Male, 80% White) and asked them to rate the fear they felt after viewing the nine pictures to assess threat manipulation (Yoon & Tinkham, 2013). Each participant randomly rated three
pictures out of the nine.

One-way ANOVA results indicated that these nine pictures differed significantly in terms of felt fear (F(8,976) = 6.135, p < .001). Among the stimuli, a picture with the hospital scene was rated as having the highest felt fear (M = 5.46, SD = 1.51). In this scene, a doctor wearing protective gear and a respirator mask is treating a patient lying on a hospital bed. In contrast, a picture depicting people working from home was rated as having the lowest felt fear (M = 4.18, SD = 1.67). This picture shows a person sitting in front of a desk and greeting a co-worker from the computer screen—a typical scene of work-from-home life and virtual meetings during quarantine. A one-way ANOVA confirmed a significant difference between these two pictures on felt fear (F(1,194) = 31.43, p < .001). As such, we selected these two pictures to present a high threat level and a low threat level, respectively.

3.3. Pretest 2 on CSR message development

Pretest 2 intended to test the manipulation of CSR appeal. To develop the CSR messages, we used a fictitious automobile brand, JAT, to prevent any irrelevant biases about real companies from impacting the results. We chose a car brand due to the automobile industry’s long history of engaging in CSR activities (Deloitte, 2020). Moreover, an automobile purchase requires high customer involvement, thereby making it individually relevant to people’s lives during the pandemic.

The CSR message described JAT’s CSR activities during the pandemic. The messages were positioned as a print ad that JAT released in response to COVID-19 and included a brief introduction of JAT’s past engagement in CSR activities. The altruistic CSR appeal highlighted the brand’s philanthropic motives and activities for the communities’ well-being, and the strategic CSR appeal focused on CSR initiatives highlighting business-serving motives and activities for the company’s profits (Shim et al., 2017; Ham & Kim, 2019). Specifically, the altruistic CSR message reads, “In order to help local communities and vulnerable groups, JAT is donating $5 million to COVID-19 response efforts and non-profits in North America.” The strategic CSR message reads, “In order to maintain corporate financial stability, JAT is offering a 120-day payment deferral and special APR offers for new vehicle purchases.” Notably, the strategic CSR message herein is a CSR initiative rather than a sales promotion, because offering a 120-day payment deferral for new car purchases surpasses a regular car sales incentive and has been considered an effective tool to financially support customers who are suffering from the pandemic, according to General Motors and Ford’s 2020 CSR reports (Ford, 2020; General Motors, 2021). Descriptions of both CSR activities were adopted from the real-world COVID-19 ads by major automobile brands such as Acura, Ford, and Buick to heighten the messages’ ecological validity.

Further, the stimuli ads are CSR in nature because the present study aims to explore the interaction effect between CSR appeals and threat intensity in COVID-19 ads. Therefore, in the context of CSR advertising, it is valid to heighten “to maintain corporate financial stability” in the strategic CSR message, although this wording may not be usually seen in traditional sales ads. According to Carroll’s (1991) classic categorization of CSR, economic responsibilities are a fundamental corporate social responsibility. For businesses, it is considered an essential social responsibility to be profitable and have enough financial resources to maintain corporate financial stability, JAT is offering a 120-day payment deferral for new car purchases surpasses a regular car sales incentive and has been considered an effective tool to financially support customers who are suffering from the pandemic, according to General Motors and Ford’s 2020 CSR reports (Ford, 2020; General Motors, 2021). Descriptions of both CSR activities were adopted from the real-world COVID-19 ads by major automobile brands such as Acura, Ford, and Buick to heighten the messages’ ecological validity.

3.4. Pretest 3 on ecological validity checks

After the first two pretests, we created four print ads using the two crisis scene pictures selected from Pretest 1 and the two CSR messages tested in Pretest 2 (The stimuli are available upon request). To further test the ecological validity of these ads, we conducted Pretest 3 to explore consumers’ perceived visual-message congruence, narrative processing fluency, CSR recognition, and message concreteness in processing the four ads. We adopted a 2 (CSR appeal: altruistic CSR vs. strategic CSR) × 2 (crisis threat depiction: low vs. high) between-subjects design. A total of 176 responses were collected from MTurk (Mage = 36.95, SD = 10.60, 69.3% Male, 86.9% White).

Each participant randomly viewed and rated one stimulus ad on 7-point scales (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Message-visual congruence was measured by three items (e.g., “The message and the visual in the ad fit well with each other.”) (Mantel & Kellaris, 2003). Narrative processing fluency was measured by three items (e.g., “The ad was easy to read.”). CSR recognition was measured by one item (i.e., “To what extent do you consider the program described in this ad is a CSR initiative?” 1 = not at all, 7 = very much). Message concreteness was rated by two items (e.g., “Regarding the CSR initiative described in the ad, to what extent do you think its information is concrete? 1 = extremely abstract, 7 = extremely concrete”).

One-way ANOVA revealed no significant difference in participants’ perceived message-visual congruence when exposed to the four ads (F(3,172) = 2.40, p = .07), indicating that participants considered the congruence levels of CSR message and threat scene similar across the four ads. Also, the narrative processing fluency of the four ads was similar to each other (F(3,172) = 0.41, p = .75), indicating that message length did not affect participants’ processing of the ads. Moreover, there was no significant difference in participants’ CSR recognition (F(3,172) = 2.05, p = .11) and perceived message concreteness (F(3,172) = 0.95, p = .42) across the ads.

3.5. Measures

All the measurements used in this study are on 7-point scales. To assess CSR appeal manipulation, we modified Ham and Kim’s (2019) scale to measure perceived CSR motives. Perceived altruistic CSR was measured by four items (e.g., I think JAT has been involved in this activity, “because it has a genuine interest in the society.”) (Cronbach’s α = 0.92). Perceived strategic CSR was measured by three items (e.g., “because it actually wants to increase its profits”) (Cronbach’s α = 0.89).

To assess threat manipulation, we measured fear. Fear was measured by three items (Dillard & Pook, 2001), “I personally feel fearful/afraid/scared” (Cronbach’s α = 0.97). Three semantic differential scales captured message credibility, anchored by “unconvincing/convincing,” “unbelievable/believable,” and “unbiased/biased” (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989) (Cronbach’s α = 0.78). Four statements examined CSR skepticism (e.g., “JAT is a socially responsible company,” Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013), with options ranging from “unsure = 1” to “sure = 7” (Cronbach’s α = 0.91). We
reverse-coded these items. To measure warmth, participants reported their agreement with five statements (e.g., “the ad communicates a good-natured message”) (Fiske et al., 2007; Holbrook & Batra, 1987) (Cronbach’s α = 0.91). Ad attitude was measured by four semantic differential scales (e.g., “unlikeable/likable”) (Zhang, 1996) (Cronbach’s α = 0.90). Brand attitude was assessed by three semantic differential scales, (e.g., “undesirable/desirable”) (Yoon & Tinkham, 2013) (Cronbach’s α = 0.92). Purchase intention was measured with four statements, such as “in the future, I think I would buy products of the brand” (Baker & Churchill, 1977) (Cronbach’s α = 0.93).

4. Results

4.1. Manipulation check

The manipulation of threat intensity was successful. One-way ANOVA revealed a main effect of threat intensity on felt fear (F (1, 434) = 17.66, p < .001). The fear score was significantly different between the high and low threat levels (Mlow = 3.20, SD = 2.13; Mhigh = 4.02, SD = 1.92). For CSR appeal manipulation, participants’ perceived altruistic CSR motive was significantly higher for the altruistic CSR message than the strategic CSR message (F (1, 434) = 28.26, p < .001; MA altruistic CSR = 5.39, SD = 1.12 vs. Mstrategic CSR = 4.72, SD = 1.46). Also, perceived strategic CSR motive was significantly lower for the altruistic CSR message than the strategic CSR message (F (1, 434) = 9.26, p = .002; MA altruistic CSR = 4.87, SD = 1.44 vs. Mstrategic CSR = 5.25, SD = 1.20). Therefore, the manipulation of CSR appeal succeeded.

4.2. Hypotheses testing

To test H1, H2, H3, H4, and H7, a two-way MANCOVA was conducted with CSR appeal and threat intensity as the independent variables, and with message credibility, CSR skepticism, warmth, ad attitudes, brand attitudes, and purchase intentions as the dependent variables. We adopted CSR attitude, prior perceived threat of COVID-19, knowledge of COVID-19, and gender as covariates. Results revealed a significant two-way interaction (Wilks’s lambda = 0.97, F (6, 423) = 2.57, p = .019, \( \eta^2 = 0.04 \)). To better understand the nature of the interaction, the univariate results revealed the following results (see Table 1): The interaction between CSR appeal and threat intensity was significant on ad attitude (F (1, 428) = 6.28, p = .013, \( \eta^2 = 0.01 \)), brand attitude (F (1, 428) = 12.76, p < .001, \( \eta^2 = 0.03 \)), and purchase intention (F (1, 428) = 6.47, p = .011, \( \eta^2 = 0.02 \)). Pairwise comparisons indicated that when participants were exposed to the ad with low threat level, ad attitude (F (1, 428) = 0.60, p = .439, \( \eta^2 = 0.00 \)), brand attitude (F (1, 428) = 0.002, p = .966, \( \eta^2 = 0.00 \)), and purchase intention (F (1, 428) = 0.332, p = .859, \( \eta^2 = 0.00 \)) did not differ across the altruistic and strategic CSR conditions. However, when participants were exposed to the ad with high threat level, altruistic CSR appeal led to higher ad attitudes (F (1, 428) = 18.11, p < .001, \( \eta^2 = 0.06 \)), better brand attitudes (F (1, 428) = 25.31, p < .001, \( \eta^2 = 0.06 \)), and greater purchase intentions (F (1, 428) = 13.90, p < .001, \( \eta^2 = 0.03 \)) than strategic CSR appeal. Hence, H1 and H2 were supported (see Figs. 2–4).

Similar patterns were found in terms of the interaction effect of CSR appeal and threat intensity on message credibility, CSR skepticism, and warmth. The interaction was significant on message credibility (F (1, 428) = 7.95, p = .002, \( \eta^2 = 0.02 \)), CSR skepticism (F (1, 428) = 4.03, p = .045, \( \eta^2 = 0.01 \)), and warmth (F (1, 428) = 7.48, p = .006, \( \eta^2 = 0.02 \)). Pairwise comparisons indicated that when participants were exposed to the ad with low threat level, message credibility (F (1, 428) = 0.069, p = .792, \( \eta^2 = 0.00 \)), CSR skepticism (F (1, 428) = 0.259, p = .611, \( \eta^2 = 0.00 \)), and warmth (F (1, 428) = 2.009, p = .157, \( \eta^2 = 0.01 \)) did not differ across the altruistic and strategic CSR conditions. When participants were exposed to the ad with high threat level, altruistic CSR appeal led to higher message credibility (F (1, 428) = 16.85, p < .001, \( \eta^2 = 0.04 \)), lower CSR skepticism (F (1, 428) = 10.90, p = .001, \( \eta^2 = 0.03 \)), and stronger warmth (F (1, 428) = 27.09, p < .001, \( \eta^2 = 0.03 \)) than strategic CSR appeal. H3, H4 and H7 were supported (see Figs. 5–7).

4.3. Mediation analyses

To test H5, H6, and H8, three moderated mediation analyses with 5000 bootstrapped samples and 95% CI were conducted using Model 8 of the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2018). CSR appeal was the independent variable. Threat intensity was the moderator. The low threat level was coded as 0, and the high threat level was coded as 1. Altruistic CSR was coded as 1, and strategic CSR was coded as 2. Ad attribute, brand attitude, and purchase intention were input as the dependent variables one at a time. Message credibility, CSR skepticism, and warmth were the

---

**Table 1**

Effects of CSR appeal and threat intensity on perceptual and behavioral variables.

| DVs                  | Low threat level | High threat level |
|----------------------|------------------|------------------|
|                      | Altruistic CSR   | Strategic CSR    | F<sub>low</sub> | Altruistic CSR   | Strategic CSR    | F<sub>high</sub> | F<sub>interaction</sub> |
| Ad attitude          | 5.56 (0.11)      | 5.44 (0.11)      | 0.60            | 5.26 (0.11)      | 4.58 (0.11)      | 18.11***         | 6.28*            |
| Brand attitude       | 5.49 (0.11)      | 5.48 (0.11)      | 0.00            | 5.54 (0.11)      | 4.75 (0.11)      | 25.31***         | 12.76***         |
| Purchase intention   | 4.99 (0.12)      | 4.96 (0.12)      | 0.03            | 4.99 (0.12)      | 4.36 (0.12)      | 13.90***         | 6.47*            |
| Message credibility  | 5.27 (0.11)      | 5.30 (0.10)      | 0.07            | 5.34 (0.11)      | 4.72 (0.11)      | 16.85***         | 9.75**           |
| CSR skepticism       | 2.64 (0.10)      | 2.71 (0.11)      | 0.26            | 2.68 (0.10)      | 3.14 (0.10)      | 10.90***         | 4.03*            |
| Warmth               | 5.26 (0.11)      | 5.05 (0.10)      | 2.01            | 5.19 (0.11)      | 4.40 (0.11)      | 27.09***         | 7.48**           |

**Notes.** *p* < 0.05, **p** < 0.01, ***p*** < 0.001; stand errors in parentheses; means are marginal means; F<sub>low</sub>(1, 428); F<sub>high</sub>(1, 428); F<sub>interaction</sub>(1, 428).

---

*Fig. 2.* Two-way interaction of CSR appeal and threat intensity on ad attitude (H1a, H2a).
mediators. CSR attitude, prior perceived threat of COVID-19, COVID-19 knowledge, previous purchase of cars, and car purchase intention were the covariates.

Message credibility significantly mediated the interaction effects between CSR appeal and threat intensity on ad attitude ($B = -0.15$, SE = 0.06, 95% CI = -0.28 to -0.05), brand attitude ($B = -0.16$, SE = 0.06, 95% CI = -0.29 to -0.05), and purchase intention ($B = -0.08$, SE = 0.05, 95% CI = -0.19 to -0.01). In the high threat condition, message credibility mediated the effects of CSR appeal on ad attitude ($B = -0.14$, SE = 0.05, 95% CI = -0.25 to -0.06), brand attitude ($B = -0.15$, SE = 0.05, 95% CI = -0.27 to -0.06), and purchase intention ($B = -0.08$, SE = 0.04, 95% CI = -0.17 to -0.01). In the low threat condition, message credibility did not mediate the effects of CSR appeal on ad attitude ($B = 0.01$, SE = 0.03, 95% CI = -0.05 to 0.07), brand attitude ($B = 0.01$, SE = 0.03, 95% CI = -0.06 to 0.07), or purchase intention ($B = 0.00$, SE = 0.02, 95% CI = -0.03 to 0.04). Hence, message credibility explained why participants responded favorably to altruistic CSR appeal, compared with strategic CSR appeal, only when they were exposed to the high-threat crisis depiction. Thus, H5 was supported.

Similarly, CSR skepticism mediated the interaction effects on ad

Fig. 3. Two-way interaction of CSR appeal and threat intensity on brand attitude (H1b, H2b).

Fig. 4. Two-way interaction of CSR appeal and threat intensity on purchase intention (H1c, H2c).

Fig. 5. Two-way interaction of CSR appeal and threat intensity on message credibility (H3).

Fig. 6. Two-way interaction of CSR appeal and threat intensity on CSR skepticism (H4).

Fig. 7. Two-way interaction of CSR appeal and threat intensity on warmth (H7).
attitude ($B = -0.10, SE = 0.06, 95\% CI = -0.23$ to $-0.01$), brand attitude ($B = -0.15, SE = 0.08, 95\% CI = -0.31$ to $-0.01$), and purchase intention ($B = 0.14, SE = 0.07, 95\% CI = -0.30$ to $-0.01$). In high threat condition, CSR skepticism mediated the effects of CSR appeal on ad attitude ($B = -0.013, SE = 0.05, 95\% CI = -0.24$ to $-0.04$), brand attitude ($B = 0.18, SE = 0.07, 95\% CI = 0.32$ to $-0.06$), and purchase intention ($B = -0.17, SE = 0.06, 95\% CI = -0.31$ to $-0.06$). In low threat condition, CSR skepticism failed to mediate the effects of CSR appeal on these three dependent variables. The results supported H6.

Moreover, warmth also mediated the interaction effects on ad attitude ($B = -0.28, SE = 0.11, 95\% CI = -0.50$ to $-0.09$), brand attitude ($B = -0.22, SE = 0.09, 95\% CI = -0.40$ to $-0.06$), and purchase intention ($B = -0.27, SE = 0.11, 95\% CI = -0.49$ to $-0.08$). In high threat condition, warmth mediated the effects of CSR appeal on ad attitude ($B = -0.38, SE = 0.10, 95\% CI = -0.59$ to $-0.20$), brand attitude ($B = -0.30, SE = 0.08, 95\% CI = -0.48$ to $-0.14$), and purchase intention ($B = -0.37, SE = 0.10, 95\% CI = -0.59$ to $-0.20$). In low threat condition, warmth failed to mediate these effects. H8 was supported.

5. Discussion

This study examined how, in the context of COVID-19 advertising, CSR appeal interacted with crisis threat depiction to impact ad efficacy. Our findings confirmed the proposed interaction effects: When a low-threat crisis depiction was included in the ad, altruistic and strategic CSR appeals generated similar responses. However, when a high-threat crisis depiction was included, altruistic CSR appeal exceeded strategic CSR appeal in terms of message credibility, warmth, ad and brand attitudes, and purchase intention. In the high threat condition, altruistic CSR appeal also yielded lower CSR skepticism than strategic CSR appeal.

Additionally, we revealed the mediating roles of message credibility, CSR skepticism, and warmth in the interaction effects on ad attitudes, brand attitudes, and purchase intentions. Cognitively, people perceived altruistic CSR appeal (vs. strategic CSR appeal) as more credible and less skeptical, resulting in more favorable ad/brand attitudes and greater purchase intentions, but only in the high threat condition. Affectionately, people generated stronger feelings of warmth toward the ad when exposed to altruistic CSR appeal (vs. strategic CSR appeal). This warmth then led to better ad/brand attitudes and purchase intentions. Similarly, this mediation relationship only works in the high threat condition.

5.1. Theoretical implications

The contributions of this study are three-fold. First, we extended the theory of CSR classifications to the context of COVID-19 advertising to account for the ad appeals. Schaefer et al. (2020) reveal the effects of CSR advertising differ across CSR domains. This study thus extended Schaefer et al. (2020) by explicating how two types of CSR domains (altruistic CSR vs. strategic CSR) influence consumers’ responses when they serve as a message appeal in advertising. This result adds to the advertising literature by discovering effective ways to advertise altruistic and strategic CSR initiatives amid a public health crisis.

Second, we integrated the threat persuasion theory and CSR literature to include threat intensity as a moderator and revealed how crisis threat depiction intertwined with the effects of CSR appeals. When CSR appeal serves as the central argument and the tangential threat is present, how consumers respond to the ad is likely to be contingent on the intensity of the crisis threat depicted. This is because threat intensity can influence information processing and affective responses. According to the OPM, the increasing threat is associated with significant cognitive processing of information and motivates individuals to enter the coping appraisal to process the ad message (i.e., the CSR appeal) (e.g., Witte & Allen, 2000). Therefore, a relatively high level of threat motivates people to scrutinize the ad message and its credibility, whereas a low threat does not motivate people enough to assess the ad carefully but to rely on heuristic cues (Metzger et al., 2010). Our results confirmed this mechanism in the context of COVID-19 advertising and revealed that in the high threat condition, people considered altruistic CSR appeal (vs. strategic CSR appeal) as more credible, warmer, favorable, and less skeptical. This result is consistent with Shim et al.’s (2017) finding that people who read a news story with an altruistic CSR frame (vs. a strategic CSR frame) generate a weaker corporate hypocrisy perception.

Moreover, we identified message credibility, CSR skepticism, and warmth as the underlying mechanism under which CSR appeal affects ad evaluations and behavior intentions, but only in the high threat condition. This result advanced extant literature on the mechanisms of CSR advertising by adding to the cognitive and affective perspectives. Cognitively, we identified message credibility and CSR skepticism as the key mediators. This finding is aligned with prior literature that exposure to CSR messages enhances message trustworthiness, which positively affects brand reputation (Eberle et al., 2013, Schaefer et al., 2020).

Additionally, we determined that, in the high threat condition, feelings of warmth accounted for people’s favorable responses to altruistic CSR appeal. Hence, the mechanism revealed provides a theoretically grounded explanation for the persuasive power of CSR appeals.

5.2. Managerial implications

Further, the results provided insights into how companies and non-profits can effectively communicate altruistic and strategic CSR initiatives in response to a public health crisis. First, the ads depicting a low-threat crisis scene can be equally effective regardless of the type of CSR appeals in boosting ad attitudes, brand attitudes, and purchase intentions. This finding indicates that when marketers aim to promote different CSR initiatives (i.e., altruistic CSR or strategic CSR), it would be strategic to employ a depiction of the crisis with low threat information (e.g., people enjoying family time during the lockdown), as these crisis depictions will not diminish ad responses. However, adopting a high-threat crisis scene (e.g., people crying and suffering from the crisis) can be risky when marketers aim to promote strategic CSR activities, suggesting that marketers should avoid featuring crisis depictions with high threat information in ads when promoting strategic CSR initiatives.

It is also noteworthy that when altruistic CSR appeal is adopted, both the high-threat and low-threat crisis depictions generate similar responses. This suggests when companies intend to promote an altruistic CSR activity amid a public crisis, such as charity programs, donations, and giving back, they can include either high-threat or low-threat information.

Last, when communicating CSR initiatives featuring a high-threat crisis depiction, marketers should focus on boosting consumers’ perceived credibility of the ad message and warm feelings, as well as lowering their skepticism toward the company’s CSR engagement, for the purpose of enhancing ad attitudes, brand attitudes, and purchase intentions. For example, companies can create content that offers their histories of CSR engagement, touching interviews with the community members, supportive quotes from the top management like the CEO, and credible pieces of evidence to demonstrate their engagement with CSR activities. Please see Table 2 for a summary of the theoretical and managerial implications.

5.3. Limitations and future research

This study entails several limitations. First, we examined the effects of CSR appeals in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the findings may only be applied to the context of a public health crisis and may not be generalized to other types of crises. Previous research indicated that the effects of CSR were sensitive to the sociocultural context (Boxenbaum, 2006; Lim et al., 2018). Hence, future research may test the model in the context of other public crises, such as the environmental crisis (e.g., global warming) and economic crisis (e.g., economic depression). Second, we explored the moderating role of threat intensity...
on the effects of CSR appeals. However, the different types of threat information may also play a role, such as whether the threat is depicted in a realistic versus manipulated way or whether the threat is directed to “the self” versus “others.” Future research can be done in this regard. Third, the manipulations of CSR appeals (altruistic CSR vs. strategic CSR) have limitations, such that the strategic CSR message may only work in the context of CSR advertising of the auto industry in response to the pandemic. This message could be extreme to apply to other types of advertising (e.g., narrative advertising, sales advertising) or industry (e.g., fashion, luxury, healthcare). Future research should employ diverse strategic and altruistic CSR messages to manipulate CSR appeals in different research contexts. Last, we used a fictitious car brand to control for confounding variables that may influence consumer responses. Future research may replicate the study by employing a different product category and a real-world brand to allow for greater generalizability of findings.

CRedIT authorship contribution statement
Quan Xie: Conceptualization, Funding acquisition, Data curation, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing, Investigation, Validation, Formal analysis, Methodology, Supervision, Resources, Project administration, Software. Tianjiao (Grace) Wang: Conceptualization, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing, Methodology.

Declaration of Competing Interest
The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Acknowledgment
This work was supported by the 2021 Sam Taylor Fellowship from the Sam Taylor Fellowship Fund of the Division of Higher Education, United Methodist General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, and by the Meadows Faculty Development Grant from Southern Methodist University

Table 2
Summary of theoretical and managerial implications.

**Theoretical Implications**
- This study reveals effective ways to advertise altruistic and strategic CSR appeals amid a public health crisis.
- This study integrates the threat persuasion theory and CSR literature to examine how crisis threat depiction intertwines with the effects of CSR appeals.
- This study identifies message credibility, CSR skepticism, and warmth as the underlying mechanism under which CSR appeal affects ad/brand attitudes and purchase intentions, but only in the high threat condition.

**Managerial Implications**
- Adopting a low threat crisis scenario (e.g., people enjoying family time during the lockdown) is equally effective regardless of promoting altruistic or strategic CSR appeal.
- Adopting a high-threat crisis scenario (e.g., people crying and suffering from the crisis) is risky to promote strategic CSR appeal.
- When altruistic CSR appeal is used, both the high-threat and low-threat crisis depictions generate similar ad responses.
- When communicating CSR initiatives featuring a high-threat crisis depiction, marketers should focus on boosting the perceived credibility of the ad message and warm feelings and lowering skepticism toward the company’s CSR engagement to enhance ad effectiveness.

References
Aaker, D. A., Stayman, D. M., & Hagerty, M. R. (1986). Warmth in advertising: Measurement, impact, and sequence effects. *Journal of Consumer Research, 12*(4), 365–381.
Baker, M. J., & Churchill, G. A., Jr (1977). The impact of physically attractive models on advertising evaluations. *Journal of Marketing Research, 14*(4), 538–555.
Baskenti, S., Sen, S., & Bhattacharyya, C. B. (2019). Consumer reactions to corporate social responsibility: The role of CSR domains. *Journal of Business Research, 95*, 502–513.
Becker-Olsen, K. L., Cudmore, B. A., & Hill, R. P. (2006). The impact of perceived corporate social responsibility on consumer behavior. *Journal of Business Research, 59*(1), 46–53.
Beer, J. (2020). Frito-Lay’s new COVID-19 ad is an anti-brand manifesto. Too bad it’s still a commercial. <https://www.fastcompany.com/90489142/frito-lyas-new-covid-ad-is-an-anti-brand-manifesto-too-bad-its-still-a-commercial>. Accessed April 14, 2021.
Bolton, L. E., & Mattila, A. S. (2015). How does corporate social responsibility affect consumer response to service failure in buyer–seller relationships? *Journal of Retailing, 91*(1), 146–153.
Boxenbaum, E. (2006). Corporate social responsibility as institutional hybrids. *Journal of Business Strategies, 23*(1), 45–63.
Brennan, L., & Binney, W. (2016). Fear, guilt, and shame appeals in social marketing. *Journal of Business Research, 63*(2), 140–146.
Brown, T. J., & Dacin, P. A. (1997). The company and the product: Corporate associations and consumer product responses. *Journal of Marketing, 61*(1), 68–84.
Carroll, A. B. (1991). The pyramid of corporate social responsibility: Toward the moral management of organizational stakeholders. *Business Horizons, 34*(4), 39–48.
Carroll, A. B. (2016). Carroll’s pyramid of CSR: Taking another look. *International Journal of Corporate Social Responsibility, 11*(1), 1–8.
Chen, X., Huang, R., Yang, Z., & Dube, L. (2018). CSR types and the moderating role of corporate competence. *European Journal of Marketing, 52*(7/8), 1258–1288.
Cho, J. (2006). The mechanism of trust and distrust formation in their relational outcomes. *Journal of Retailing, 82*(1), 25–35.
Cuddy, A. J., Fiske, S. T., & Glick, P. (2008). Warmth and competence as universal dimensions of social perception: The stereotype content model and the BIAS map. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, 40*, 61–149.
Garcia-De Iion, Salmones, M., & Perez, A. (2018). Effectiveness of CSR advertising: The role of reputation, consumer attributions, and emotions. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management, 25*(2), 194–206.
Deloitte. (2020). Accelerated transformation of automotive business CSR and brand strategies. <https://www2.dekloitte.com/cx/en/pages/consumer-business/articles/consumer-ncp-auto-csr-brand-strategy.html>. Accessed Sep 22, 2020.
Diekmann, S., & Holmes, M. (2008). Understanding the emotional and coping responses of adolescent individuals exposed to threat appeals. *International Journal of Advertising, 27*(2), 251–278.
Diehl, S., Terlutter, R., & Mueller, B. (2016). Doing good matters to consumers: The role of reputation, consumer attributions, and emotions. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management, 23*(2), 59–74.
Dillard, J. P., & Anderson, J. W. (2004). The role of fear in persuasion. *Psychology & Marketing, 21*(11), 909–926.
Dillard, J. P., & Peck, F. (2001). Persuasion and the structure of affect: Dual systems and discrete emotions as complementary models. *Human Communication Research, 27*(1), 38–68.
Du, S., Bhattacharyya, C. B., & Sen, S. (2010). Maximizing business returns to corporate social responsibility (CSR): The role of CSR communication. *International Journal of Management Reviews, 12*(1), 8–19.
Eberle, D., Berens, G., & Li, T. (2013). The impact of interactive corporate social responsibility communication on corporate reputation. *Journal of Business Ethics, 118*(4), 731–746.
Edelman (2020). Edelman trust barometer special report: Brand trust in 2020. <https://www.edelman.com/research/brand-trust-2020/>. Accessed April 12, 2021.
Eisen, M., & Tarrish, F. (2016). The effectiveness of advertising: A meta-meta-analysis of advertising inputs and outcomes. *Journal of Advertising, 45*(4), 519–531.
Fernandez, P., Hartmann, P., & Apapazoglou, V. (2021). What does CSR communication effectiveness on social media? A process-based theoretical framework and research agenda. *International Journal of Advertising, 1*, 2–29.
Fiske, S. T., Cuddy, A. J., & Glick, P. (2007). Universal dimensions of social cognition: Warmth and competence. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences, 11*(2), 77–83.
Flanagan, A. J., & Meteger, M. J. (2000). Perceptions of Internet information credibility. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 77*(3), 515–540.
Ford (2020). Committed to lending a hand, Ford offers assistance to customers, community during COVID-19 outbreak. <https://media.ford.com/content/fordmedia/fna/us/en/news/2020/03/16/ford-offers-customers-community-assistance-COVID19.html>. Accessed April 14, 2021.
Ford (2021). Helping build a better world. <https://corporate.ford.com/microsites/integrated-sustainability-and-financial-report-2021/index.html>. Accessed December 30, 2021.
Hao, C., & Kim, J. (2019). The role of CSR in crises: Integration of situational crisis communication theory and the persuasion knowledge model. *Journal of Business Ethics, 158*(2), 352–372.
Hayes, A. F. (2018). Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: A regression-based approach (2nd ed.). Guilford Publications.
He, H., & Harris, L. (2020). The impact of Covid-19 pandemic on corporate social responsibility and marketing philosophy. *Journal of Business Research, 116*, 176–182.
Holbrook, M. B., & Batra, R. (1987). Assessing the role of emotions as mediators of consumer responses to advertising. *Journal of Consumer Research, 14*(3), 404–420.
