THE INFLUENCE OF MOTIVATED REASONING ON THE PROCESSING OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY INFORMATION

Aronté Bennett
Zeynep Gürhan-Canli
Durairaj Maheswaran*

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* Aronté Bennett is a doctoral student at the Leonard N. Stern School of Business at New York University (abennett@stern.nyu.edu). Zeynep Gürhan-Canli is an Associate Professor at Koc University in Istanbul, Turkey (zcanli@ku.edu.tr). Durairaj Maheswaran is the Paganelli-Bull Professor of Marketing & International Business at the Leonard N. Stern School of Business at New York University (dmaheswa@stern.nyu.edu).
ABSTRACT

Past research examining the effects of corporate social responsibility (CSR) on consumer product evaluations has produced an equivocal set of findings. One stream of research finds that information pertaining to CSR activities indirectly impacts perceptions of products through the way in which firms are perceived. In contrast, another stream of research finds that the relationship between CSR activities and product evaluations is a direct one. The research at hand uses the theoretical framework of motivated reasoning to parsimoniously integrate the various findings relating to the impact of CSR on product evaluations.

Research within a variety of domains suggests that the manner in which people process information is influenced by activated motivations. Specifically, when consumers are influenced by accuracy motives, they are likely to rely upon the most relevant information available. On the other hand, impression and defense motives may encourage people to rely upon less relevant information. If consumers consider CSR information to be of reduced relevance, its usage in evaluations may be affected by active motives. We set about exploring this possibility in a series of three studies.

The first study investigates how consumers’ ability to be accurate in their judgments influences the impact that information pertaining to CSR associations has on product evaluations. The second study compares the influence of accuracy motives to that of impression motives. The third study considers the impact of CSR under the influence of defense motives. Our results indicate that CSR activities are not influential under accuracy motives, but that they do influence evaluations under the influence of both impression and defense motives. In an unexpected finding, across all three studies, the impact of CSR was dependent upon product quality.
In a series of three studies, we establish that impact of CSR on product evaluations is a function of activated motives. In general, this research contributes to the field by offering resolution to the controversy over the impact of CSR activities on product evaluations. This work also extends the literature on both CSR and motivated reasoning while offering public policy implications.
Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has recently been the center of much attention in both the popular and academic media. It’s possible that interest in the phenomenon is being prompted by the increasing number of firms participating in socially responsible programs. In 2001, it was estimated that $9 billion was spent by corporations in support of socially responsible causes (Ellen, Webb & Mohr, 2006). Some of the more popular causes enjoy unparalleled support: (RED), an organization created to fight AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria through its work in conjunction with the Global Fund, is supported by a network of companies and raised $45.5 million in its inaugural year (The Persuaders, 2007a; The Persuaders, 2007b); meanwhile, Susan G. Komen for the Cure lists 69 corporate sponsors that were responsible for raising approximately $240 million in the fight against breast cancer in 2006 (Annual Report, 2006). A glimpse at recent headlines suggests that CSR is being embraced across a wide range of industries in a number of permutations: guitar manufacturers, including Gibson and Fender, partnered with Greenpeace to reduce the logging of old growth forests (Rifkin, 2007); Microsoft pledged $50 million to community colleges (Brown, 2006); and Target sponsored National Volunteer Week (Points of Light Foundation, 2007).

It’s not only the press that is noticing the burgeoning sphere of CSR; consumers are also taking an active interest. A recent poll conducted by Capstrat and FGI Research found that fifty percent of consumers reported an increase in their concern over the quality of CSR initiatives over the past several years (PR Week, 2007). In the same poll, thirty-four percent of respondents said that in at least one instance they were impressed enough by a company's CSR efforts to do business with that company. Taken together, these findings suggest that consumers are increasingly aware of and influenced by CSR. Interest in CSR-affiliated firms is also reflected in the financial markets; in 1999, Dow Jones launched its Sustainability Indexes to track the
financial performance of the leading sustainability-driven firms for a number of geographical regions (SAM Indexes).

Complementing its popularity with the media and consumers, there has been a recent surge of academic interest in CSR. Researchers have considered topics including the potential for CSR campaigns to be profitable (Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006), the type of products best equipped to be associated with CSR (Strahilevitz & Myers, 1996), and how CSR information transfers between products in a firm’s portfolio (Biehal & Sheinin, 2007). A large portion of the literature on corporate social responsibility examines the impact that CSR has on evaluations of the firm and the product (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001) and ways in which CSR differs from other corporate associations (Gurhan-Canli & Batra, 2004). The literature, however, has neglected to consider the role that external circumstances, particularly activated motivations, play in the usage and processing of CSR information. As far as we can tell, all previous research on corporate social responsibility operates under the implicit assumption that if CSR information is available to consumers, they will use it uniformly across all situations. The studies contained herein attempt to debunk this assumption and provide evidence of the influence of circumstance, specifically activated motives, in how CSR information is used in the formulation of evaluations.

Our investigation offers a twofold contribution to the marketing literature. First, we provide resolution to the mixed findings related to the effect of CSR with empirical support for the direct impact of corporate social responsibility on product evaluation. Second, we establish that different activated motives can bear differential influence on the use of CSR information in determining product evaluations. In summary, it is demonstrated that the information that consumers have regarding a firm’s corporate social responsibility can directly influence their
evaluations of products produced by that firm; this influence varies with active motivations and the relative quality of the firm’s products.

The remainder of this paper is devoted to examining and understanding how activated motivations influence the use and impact of CSR information on product evaluations. The first section contains a literature review that covers extant research on the influence of CSR information and the impact that active motives have on the processing of information. Research hypotheses are then developed and presented. In the second section a series of three experiments that examine these research hypotheses are described and discussed. The paper concludes with a general discussion, managerial and theoretical implications, and suggestions for future research.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**CSR Defined**

Corporate social responsibility has been defined in almost as many ways as perspectives from which it has been examined. Davis and Blomstrom (1975) defined it as a managerial obligation to protect and improve society and the organization (as cited in Sen & Bhattacharya, 1997). Hawkes and Stead (1996) considered it to be an activity designed to simultaneously benefit society and the corporation, while Kotler (1991) conceptualized it as doing business in a way that improves societal well-being. More recently, Dahlsrud (2008) compared a number of different definitions of the term and posited that at the most theoretical level CSR is composed of five dimensions: stakeholder, social, economic, voluntariness, and environmental. In order to allow for the most parsimonious and comprehensive view of the phenomenon, Brown and Dacin’s (1997) definition will be adopted: “Corporate social responsibility … reflects the organization’s status and activities with respect to its perceived societal obligations.”
CSR can reflect perceived societal obligations by assuming a number of forms including, but not limited to, philanthropy, cause-related marketing, environmental responsibility, employee support, non-US operations, diversity, community involvement, and humane treatment of employees (Dahlsrud, 2008; Ellen, Webb & Mohr, 2006; KLD, 2007). Past literature has frequently operationalized CSR as cause-related marketing (CRM) (Gurhan-Canli & Batra, 2004; Pracejus & Olsen, 2004) and the terms are often used interchangeably. However, these terms reflect distinct activities. Varadarajan and Menon (1988) define CRM as “the process of formulating and implementing marketing activities that are characterized by an offer from the firm to contribute a specified amount to a designated cause when customers engage in revenue-providing exchanges that satisfy organizational and individual objectives.” A distinguishing characteristic of CRM is its source of funding; unlike other forms of social responsibility, CRM projects are funded through the marketing department’s budget. A commonly cited example of the genesis of CRM campaigns is American Express’ fundraising campaign for the Statue of Liberty, in which the company donated one cent to the monument’s restoration fund for each qualifying transaction performed by eligible card members (Varadarajan & Menon, 1988).

Although similar, CSR and CRM reflect different practices. More explicitly, by definition CSR encompasses CRM so that all CRM can be classified as CSR, but not all CSR is necessarily CRM. Consequently, findings from research on CRM can be generalized and applied to other forms of CSR.

The existing literature on corporate social responsibility can be roughly classified into one of three categories, which focus on the phenomenon from the perspective of the consumer, the firm, or the cause. Most extant research from the consumer’s perspective has focused on the influence of CSR information on attitudes, intentions, or behavior. There are also large streams
of literature that consider CSR from the perspectives of the firm and the cause, including research examining the plausibility of extracting profit from socially responsible behavior (Keim, 1978; Swanson, 1995; Lafferty, Goldsmith & Hult, 2004; Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006) and the impact that CSR campaigns have on the reputation and future support of charities (Lafferty, Goldsmith & Hult, 2004). The literature on these topics, however vast and interesting, is beyond the scope of the present research. The remainder of this paper will focus on CSR from the perspective of the consumer.

Much of the research on corporate social responsibility that considers the phenomenon from the consumer perspective examines the impact that CSR has on consumers’ evaluations of either the firm or the product or both. Research on this topic has produced mixed findings. One stream of this research suggests that CSR does not have a direct and/or consistent impact on product evaluations. In their pioneering article, Brown and Dacin (1997) consider the impact that CSR, as one of many possible corporate associations, has on evaluations of the firm and product. Their research contrasted associations related to corporate ability with those related to CSR, and asserted that these associations would influence evaluations differently due to differences in relevance to the company’s ability to manufacture products. Their results support these expectations; corporate ability associations were found to directly impact evaluations of both the firm and the product, whereas CSR associations directly impact firm evaluations and indirectly influence product evaluations through its impact on evaluations of the firm.

In another stream of research, Sen and Bhattacharya (2001) also consider CSR vis-à-vis other corporate associations; however, their model diverges substantially from the one posited by Brown and Dacin (1996). By incorporating “when, how and for whom specific CSR initiatives work,” these authors are able to examine the impact of the interaction of CSR associations, both
positive and negative, and individual differences. Additionally, they posit that CSR information can bear a direct influence on both company and product evaluations. Their findings suggest that the positive relationship between CSR information and corporate evaluations is mediated by consumers’ perception of the similarity between themselves and the corporation and is moderated by consumers’ inherent support for CSR. In line with the negativity effect, the severity of response varied asymmetrically by valence of CSR information, such that consumers reacted more extremely to negative information than they did to positive information. The findings also suggest that CSR associations directly and indirectly influence product evaluations. Although the direct route between CSR and product evaluation is a simple positive relationship, the indirect route is more complex; corporate associations of product quality create a context in which positive CSR information can reduce product evaluations.

Berens, van Riel and van Bruggen (2005) consider how the visibility of corporate branding in advertising interacts with CSR versus other corporate associations in influencing attitudes. They find that the dominance of corporate branding leads to disparate effects when in conjunction with corporate ability versus CSR. Unlike other corporate associations, CSR is not found to have a consistent impact on attitudes. Rather, CSR’s influence was found to be contingent upon the dominance of the corporate brand: CSR only influenced evaluations when the corporate brand was not dominant. Although they do not explicitly conceptualize it as a corporate association, Lafferty, Goldsmith and Hult (2004) also find that CSR activities influence consumers’ evaluations of firms.

Work by Klein and Dawar (2004) considers the influence that CSR has on attitudes and asserts that CSR bears a direct influence on evaluations of the product. Madrigal (2000) extended these findings to new products; like other corporate associations, CSR has been found
to influence both firm and product evaluations directly. Outside of the rubric of corporate associations, Barone, Miyazaki and Taylor (2000) demonstrate that consumers evaluate products associated with CSR more favorably than identical products without CSR associations. Furthermore, they find that even in the face of moderate price or quality inferiority, consumers evaluate products more favorably when they have CSR associations, suggesting that in some instances consumers make trade-offs and permit CSR to compensate for attributes. Relative to other affinity marketing programs, socially responsible initiatives have been found to have a positive impact on product evaluations (Bloom, Hoeffler, Keller & Meza, 2006)

In addition to attitudes, research also considers the influence that CSR initiatives have on consumer intentions. A number of research findings point to the fact the CSR associations lead to increased purchase intent (Murray & Vogel, 1997; Barone, Miyazaki & Taylor, 2000). The work of Creyer and Ross (1997) focuses specifically on the influence that the ethical behavior of a firm has on purchase intentions. Survey responses suggest that consumers not only expect firms to behave ethically, but that they are willing to reward ethical behavior and punish unethical behavior through the price they are willing to pay for products.

Instance of purchase is the most rigorous test of CSR’s influence. Evidence from qualitative studies suggests that CSR can influence purchasing behavior; however, this only holds true for some personality types (Mohr, Webb & Harris, 2001). This finding loosely supports previous field study results that reflect the impact of CSR in purchase decisions. Strahilevitz and Meyers (1998) find that CSR campaigns can influence instances of purchase; however, this effect only holds true for certain product categories.

A large portion of the literature on CSR either implicitly or explicitly compares its diagnosticity to that of other product or firm attributes. Within this literature, CSR is considered
to be less diagnostic for evaluations of product functionality or performance (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Barone, Miyazaki & Taylor, 2000; Gurhan-Canli & Batra, 2004) than other attributes are. Berens, van Riel and van Bruggen (2005) call upon the accessibility-diagnosticity framework and argue that CSR information is lower in diagnosticity than corporate ability information is. While this framework acknowledges the inherent differences in diagnosticity between CSR and corporate associations revealed in earlier works, it argues that even the reduced diagnosticity of CSR information can be influential under sufficiently low levels of motivation. Research on relevance suggests that it is positively correlated to diagnosticity (Meyvis & Janiszewski, 2002). When the relationship between diagnosticity and relevance is considered, these findings are in line with previous work on the interaction of involvement and information relevance; less relevant information becomes more influential when involvement is decreased and more relevant information grows in influence when involvement is increased (Maheswaran, Mackie & Chaiken, 1992).

Folkes and Kamins (1999) consider the diagnosticity of information about a firm’s socially responsible activities vis-à-vis that of information about product quality. Their results indicate that the relationship depends on the specific levels of each type of information. Information regarding social irresponsibility (i.e., unethical hiring practices) was found to be more diagnostic, and therefore exert more influence on evaluations, than information regarding product performance. However, product performance information was found to be more diagnostic than information about positive or neutral levels of socially responsible behavior. The combined findings of the aforementioned studies suggest that CSR is less relevant than many other corporate associations and product attributes; consequently, it influences attitudes, intentions and behaviors differently than other, more relevant, information does.
In order to gain a more complete understanding of CSR from the consumers’ perspective, it is necessary to understand what motivates consumers to support firms’ efforts to be socially responsible. Although motives for supporting CSR are rarely the specific focus of research, it is possible to generalize from research on the motives behind helping behaviors and the general phenomenon of altruism. It can be inferred that as a subset of these behaviors the findings can be applied, if only loosely, to CSR.

Motivations for engaging in helping behaviors range from selfless to self-serving. On the selfless end of the spectrum, researchers lean on psychological theories and argue that consumers engage in helping behaviors solely for the benefit that it provides to other parties. In addition to traditional arguments for pure altruism (Mikulincer, Shaver, Gillath, & Nitzberg, 2005), Dawes and Thaler (1988) introduce aspiration to “do the right thing” as a motivation for helping behavior. The other end of the spectrum calls upon the fundamentals of economic theory to argue that consumers engage in helping behaviors solely for the potential of personal gain. Research from this perspective suggests that romance, moral satisfaction, tax incentives, control, social interaction, social signaling, self-enhancement, professional ambitions, and desirability of the outcome can serve as motivations for engaging in helping behaviors (Kahneman & Knetsch, 1992; Glazer & Konrad, 1996; Mathur, 1996; Griskevicius, Tybur, Sundie, & Cialdini, 2007).

Specific to CSR, the theory of affect-based complementarity posited by Strahilevitz & Myers (1998) suggests that support of CSR initiatives can be motivated by the desire to reduce guilt associated with other consumption behaviors. In between the poles of the motivation spectrum, hybrid theories combine psychological and economic approaches to explain why consumers engage in prosocial behaviors. Theories of “warm glow” suggest that when people contribute to the public good, they not only extract utility from the increase in the public good, but they also
extract utility from the act of giving (Adreoni, 1990; Harbaugh, Mayr, & Burghart, 2007). Theories based on social exchange theory, reciprocal altruism, and maintenance of equitable relationships (Walster, Berscheid, & Walster, 1973; Dawes & Thaler, 1988) also combine selfless and self-serving motives. Notably, it is plausible that what appear to be identical acts in support of CSR can be driven by different motives. Literature on functionalism in prosocial behavior finds that alignment with an individual’s underlying motivation and the opportunity to behave in a prosocial manner increases the likelihood of performing such an act and also increases the benefit derived from the act (Clary, Snyder, Ridge, Copeland, Stukas, Haugen & Miene, 1998).

**Motivated Reasoning**

While research on the impact that the enduring, semi-permanent motivations mentioned above have on CSR is limited, the literature has completely overlooked the role that more temporary, circumstantial motivations may have on the way CSR is incorporated into evaluations. Research on motivated reasoning examines how temporary, primed, or situationally-induced motivations influence the way information is processed. Through the lens of this stream of literature it is possible to gain understanding of the ways in which temporary motivations potentially influence the processing of CSR-related information. Under the rubric of motivated reasoning, certain circumstances may lead consumers to forgo objective processing and opt instead to selectively process information in the service of a motivational goal (Johar, Maheswaran, & Peracchio, 2006).

Most of the work on motivated reasoning considers independent motives separately; that is, each study examines the relative impact of a different set of motivations (Kruglanski 1990; Kunda 1990). However, work on the heuristic-systematic model (HSM) deviates from this
convention. Within the framework of HSM, three distinctive motivations for processing are considered simultaneously and repeated (Chen & Chaiken, 1999). By virtue of repetition in examining the impact of these motivations, clear hypotheses have been developed in regard to how information is processed under each motivation. Accuracy-motivated processing is marked by objective handling of the information relevant to the decision. In most instances, accuracy motivations lead to more elaborate processing of relevant and available information. In the case that decision makers have limited cognitive ability, low motivation, or a shortage of available relevant information, they may resort to less elaborate processing that uses whichever available piece of information they believe will best satisfy their accuracy goals. When required to evaluate a product’s performance, under conditions that lend themselves to more elaborate accuracy-motivated processing, consumers should rely on information that is most relevant to product performance. Alternatively, if consumers are impression-motivated, processing is marked by the desire to fulfill social goals. When consumers are impression-motivated, they process information in the service of the activated social goal at any level of elaboration. To this end, the relevance of product attribute information is determined not by its reflection on product performance, but rather by its ability to aid in fulfillment of the activated social goal. If a consumer is motivated to create an impression of being friendly, the subsequent information search and usage will be biased toward that which suggests that he or she is, in fact, friendly. Similarly, if a consumer is motivated to create an impression in which he or she appears environmentally aware, information that reflects an awareness of the environment will receive preferential treatment in processing. Defense-motivated processing is marked by the need to defend existing beliefs and attitudes. Defense motives are served by selective processing in which the decision-maker considers information in agreement with their existing attitudes and/or
beliefs; information that is not in agreement will be discounted or dismissed. Under certain circumstances, when decision-makers are highly motivated and have ample cognitive ability, defense motives may lead to more elaborate processing. When this occurs, information will be processed effortfully, but biased in service of the pre-existing attitudes or beliefs of the decision-maker. Any of these three motivations can lead to elaborate or superficial processing; irrespective of the depth of the resultant processing, each motivation will lead to information being used differently. When the same information is made available, accuracy motivations lead to more objective processing of information, while defense motivations introduces a bias towards pre-existing belief or attitudes, and impression motivations introduce bias towards information that is aligned with activated social goals.

The results from existing studies on CSR point to its ability to satisfy both impression- and defense-motivated goals. Basil, Basil and Weber (2006) suggest that people with either value-oriented personalities or high concern for appearances will be more likely than those lacking these personality traits to support a company based on its CSR behaviors. Using secondary data from 6,065 respondents, they measured the influence that personality traits have on purchase intentions related to CSR-affiliated products and perceptions of the importance of CSR. Regression results suggest that both value orientation and concern for appearance significantly influence intentions to purchase CSR-related products; however, only value orientation predicted the perceived importance of CSR. Combined, these results imply that although both types of personalities (those who value altruism and those who are concerned with appearances) are more likely than others to intend to purchase CSR-related products, only value-oriented consumers believe in the innate importance of CSR. The use of CSR information in determining purchase intent for those who are concerned with appearances (a social concern)
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despite the lack of value ascribed to the importance of CSR by the same group of consumers indicates that CSR can be leveraged to reach social goals. In contrast, the ability of CSR to fulfill defense motives is evidenced by consumers who place value on CSR and use it in determining purchase intent. Consumer-Company Congruence (C-C Congruence), as conceptualized by Sen and Bhattacharya (2001), captures the ability of CSR to serve activated defense motives. C-C congruence reflects the perceived similarity between a consumer and a firm, as reported by the consumer. Study results indicate that C-C congruence mediates the relationship between CSR information and firm evaluations; however, this result only holds when consumers reported support for the concept of CSR. In the absence of CSR support, C-C congruence did not mediate the relationship between evaluations of the firm and CSR information. The moderated mediation provides support for the power of the dual influences of CSR information on evaluations. It suggests that if a consumer has a positive attitude toward a firm, as reflected in C-C congruence, then that consumer is likely to evaluate a firm more positively when it engages in CSR activities. Furthermore, if a consumer supports the concept of CSR, then that consumer is likely report increased levels of C-C congruence and therefore evaluate a firm more positively when it engages in CSR activities.

Previously reviewed evidence suggests that CSR is often instrumental in determining product evaluations despite the fact that it is considered to be less relevant than other available information. Within the framework of motivated reasoning, this implies that activated motives will affect the effect of CSR on product evaluations differentially. Accuracy motives prompt objective evaluation. Therefore, CSR, an attribute that does not convey information about product performance, will have limited influence under these motives; rather, information that is more relevant to product performance will be influential. Under accuracy motives, evaluations
are expected to be equivalent for high and low levels of CSR. Impression motives also prompt selective evaluation focusing on information that satisfies activated social goals; CSR is expected to be influential only when it services those goals. When the associated social goals are activated, high levels of CSR will be more influential than low levels will be. Defense motives prompt selective evaluation of attitude congruent information, CSR will only be influential when aspects of the CSR campaign are congenial to existing attitudes. Ceteris paribus, defense-motivated consumers are expected to provide higher evaluations when the CSR campaign includes a cause to which they are already positively disposed. Because it does not fulfill activated goals, we do not expect product quality to be influential under either impression or defense motivations. The following hypotheses reflect these expectations.

H1a: Under accuracy motives, strong (vs. weak) product quality arguments will result in more favorable product evaluations

H1b: Under accuracy motives, there will be no differences in product evaluations for high (vs. low) levels of CSR

H2: Under impression motives, high (vs. low) levels of CSR will result in more favorable product evaluations

H3: Under defense motives, high (vs. low) levels of preference for the cause supported by CSR will result in more favorable product evaluations.

We conducted three studies to test these hypotheses. In each experiment, participants encountered motivational primes and then were presented with information about a firm, including its CSR activities, and information about the quality of a product produced by the firm. In the first study, participants faced primes that induced either high or low accuracy motivations through cognitive ability. In the second study, participants were exposed primes that induced
either impression or accuracy motives. In the third study, priming induced defense motives based on preference consistency, or failed to do so. Although we borrow from the parsimonious multi-motive framework of the HSM model, we remain agnostic towards the specific theory of information processing that accounts for the expected differences in usage of CSR information created by activated motives.

**STUDY 1**

Study 1, was designed to provide preliminary evidence for the influence of motivated reasoning on the impact of CSR on product evaluations. In this study, we included the motivation prime in the experimental instructions; a proxy for accuracy motivations was used. Participants read instructions that either required them to recall a random seven digit number or failed to do so; respectively, these instructions primed high- and low-ability which have been shown to parallel information processing under high- and low-accuracy motives. As a proxy for accuracy motivation, we expect that differences in information processing between high-ability participants and those who have low-ability to replicate differences between high- and low-accuracy motivation information processing. Under high-accuracy motives consumers tend to use more relevant information when generating evaluations. On the other hand, absent this type of motivation, consumers may rely on less relevant information when generating evaluations. After reading the instructions, participants went on to read information about a firm in which the CSR manipulation was imbedded. They also read information about an MP3 player produced by the firm which cast the player as either superior or inferior to the competition. Then, participants made a series of evaluations of the target product. We predicted that the different types of information utilized in high- and low-accuracy motivated processing proxied by the ability
manipulations would lead to different evaluations in the subsequent tasks. More specifically, we predicted that participants in the high ability condition that proxies high-accuracy motivation would generate evaluations based on product quality arguments, while participants in the low ability condition that proxies low accuracy motivation would generate evaluations based on CSR-related information.

Method

**Design.** The relationship between CSR and product evaluations was examined using a 2(ability: high vs. low) x 2(CSR involvement: high vs. low) x 2(product quality: strong vs. weak) factorial design. Participants were 160 undergraduate students at New York University who received partial course credit for their participation.

**Stimuli.** Participants were tested in groups of 4-10 persons and were randomly assigned to between subject conditions. Participants first read the instructions for the study that contained the manipulation of ability, the accuracy motivation proxy. Chaiken (1980) suggests that accuracy motivation is comprised of two components: ability and motivation. Altering either component is sufficient to manipulate accuracy motives. Levels of ability, and therefore accuracy motivation, were manipulated by varying ability through cognitive load. Similar to the work by Fischer (2008) and Ditto and Lopez (1992), in the low-ability condition, participants were asked to remember an unfamiliar seven-digit number as they completed the study. Alternatively, other participants assigned to the high-ability motivation condition were not given a memorization task.

All participants then read a passage about a manufacturer, Company XYZ, which produces the target product, an MP3 player; a fictitious firm was used to avoid differential
effects of brand knowledge. The passage also included information pertaining to a CSR campaign. In the high-CSR condition, participants read that Company XYZ was a champion in its involvement in socially responsible initiatives and that $10 from the sale of every MP3 player would go to a music education charity. Alternatively, in the low-CSR condition, participants read that the company was a laggard in its socially responsible initiatives and that $1 from the sale of every MP3 player would go to a music education charity. Pretests indicate that MP3 players and music education charities form an appropriate cause brand alliance; participants rate the indexed score of appropriateness and goodness of fit of the combination (α=.934) well above the scale midpoint of 5 (M=7.23, t(36)=9.60, p<.001). Immediately after reading about the manufacturer, participants evaluated the firm on three scales anchored by “very unfavorable” and “very favorable”, “very bad and “very good”, and “poor” and “excellent”. These scales combined to form the CSR cue manipulation check. Participants went on to read a description of the MP3 Player that contained comparisons to competitors’ products on three important and three unimportant attributes (Agrawal & Maheswaran 2005). In pretests, the three important attributes were determined to be battery life, size, and memory. The three unimportant attributes were determined to be color, accessories, and voice recording capability. In the strong product quality condition, participants read that the MP3 player outperforms the competition on the important attributes, but not the unimportant ones. In the weak product quality condition, participants read that the MP3 player outperforms the competition on the unimportant attributes, but not the important ones. In order to control for the effect of price, the target product was described as being priced equivalently with competing products in both conditions. Separate pretests indicated that the product descriptions resulted in significantly different perceptions of quality; participants exposed to the strong product quality condition perceived the product to be
significantly better than those in the weak product quality condition ($M_{\text{strong}}=5.10$, $M_{\text{weak}}=4.53$, $t(26)=4.53$, $p<.001$). After reading the product comparisons, participants completed dependent measures and manipulation checks, and provided demographic information.

**Dependent variables.** Participants evaluated the quality of the MP3 players on three scales anchored with favorable/unfavorable, good/bad, and desirable/undesirable. All dependent variables and manipulation checks in this study use nine-point semantic differential scales.

**Manipulation Checks.** Immediately after being presented with CSR information, but prior to being presented with MP3 player quality information, participants completed the CSR cue manipulation check. After completing reviewing all of the stimuli, participants in the low-ability condition were tested on their recall of the seven-digit number.

**Results**

**Manipulation Checks.** A Chi-Square test was performed to assess the success of the ability manipulation. Significantly more participants in the low ability condition recalled the assigned seven-digit number within one digit than chance would predict ($\chi^2(1, N = 70) = 11.200$, $p < 0.001$). An ANOVA on the indexed manufacturer evaluation scale ($\alpha=.948$) revealed a significant main effect of CSR involvement ($M_{\text{high}}=7.88$, $M_{\text{low}}=7.06$ $F(1, 159)=19.93$, $p<.001$). No other effects approached significance.

**Evaluations.** A 2x2x2 ANOVA, on the indexed product evaluation measure ($\alpha=.929$) yielded significant main effects of CSR involvement ($M_{\text{high}}=7.53$, $M_{\text{low}}=6.92$ $F(1, 153)=9.41$, $p<.01$) and product quality argument ($M_{\text{weak}}=7.49$, $M_{\text{strong}}=6.98$ $F(1, 153)=6.39$, $p<.01$) in addition to a significant ability x csr involvement interaction ($F(1, 152)=5.907$, $p=.05$). (See Appendix A, Figure 1.) Although three-way interaction was not present, simple interaction
effects were examined based on a priori expectations stated in the hypotheses. The test for
simple interaction showed that within the high ability motivation condition there was a
significant main effect of argument strength ($M_{\text{strong}}=7.47$, $M_{\text{weak}}=6.85$ $F(1, 152)=4.54$, $p<.05$).
Providing support for hypothesis 1a, strong (vs. weak) product quality arguments led to more
favorable product evaluations. Similarly, hypothesis 1b was also supported; CSR involvement
did not impact product evaluations in the high ability condition ($M_{\text{high}}=7.283$, $M_{\text{low}}=7.044$ $F(1, 152)<1$). Within the low ability condition, a significant main effect of CSR involvement was
revealed ($M_{\text{high}}=7.86$, $M_{\text{low}}=6.76$ $F(1, 152)= 11.48$, $p<.001$). Simple effects indicate that while
products with high levels of CSR involvement are evaluated more positively than those that are
affiliated low levels of CSR involvement when the product quality arguments were weak ($M_{\text{high}}=
7.892$ vs. $M_{\text{low}}=6.352$; $F(1, 152)= 11.563$ $p<.001$). In an unexpected result, this difference is not
evidenced when the product quality arguments were strong ($M_{\text{high}}= 7.949$ vs. $M_{\text{low}}=7.196$; $F(1, 152)= 2.343$ $p=.131$). Under low ability conditions, product evaluations depended on product
quality in addition to CSR such that the difference in CSR involvement levels only influenced
evaluations in the weak product quality argument condition.

**Discussion**

In sum, this study demonstrates that CSR information is used differentially contingent
upon the level of accuracy motivation (as demonstrated using ability manipulations). Participants
who were able to be accurate were influenced by the most relevant information available; high-
quality products were rated more favorably than low-quality ones. In contrast, participants who
were not able to be accurate were influenced by less relevant information; products with high
CSR involvement associations were evaluated more positively than those with low associations.
Although we predicted that product quality would not be influential under conditions that reduce
accuracy motivation our evidence does not support this. Specifically, the influence of CSR appears to be dependent upon product quality such that CSR is only influential when product quality arguments are weak.

In Study 1, we simulated differences in levels of accuracy motivation by manipulating ability and were able to show that under conditions that engender objectivity and reliance upon relevant information, product quality influences evaluations. However, under conditions that engender consideration of less relevant information, the influence of CSR information plays a role in evaluations. Our findings point to the possibility that motivated reasoning influences the way in which information, particularly CSR information, is processed, but the results listed above are not sufficient to conclude this. Furthermore, the unexpected influence of product quality in conditions that limit accuracy motivation warrants further examination. Additionally, the motivated reasoning literature alludes to a host of different motives; thus far we have only examined one. In Study 1, we evidenced a pattern of results similar to that expected when accuracy motivation is manipulated through the use of a proxy construct. However, it is necessary to directly manipulate accuracy motivation to establish causality for the reported effects. In order to fully understand the impact of active motives on the processing of CSR information, a rigorous examination of the use of CSR information under multiple motives is necessary. We begin to address these issues in Study 2 in which we compare the use of CSR information under accuracy and impression motives.


**STUDY 2**

This study examines the differing effects of accuracy and impression motivations on the processing of CSR information and subsequent product evaluations. Furthermore, it attempts to lend credence to the findings of Study 1 by replicating the results found in the high accuracy motivation condition, while reproducing results similar to the low accuracy motivation condition by employing another motivation expected to engender consideration of less relevant information. Doing so will allow us to consider CSR in the broader context of the multiple motivations considered within the literature on motivated reasoning and will provide greater insight into the ways in which CSR information influences product evaluations.

The motivations we used in Study 2 were accuracy and impression. We selected each of these motives for specific reasons. Accuracy motives were chosen for two reasons. First, they allow us to re-examine the effects reported in Study 1. In Study 1 accuracy motivations were induced via proxy, Study 2 was designed to investigate the role of accuracy motives using a more direct manipulation. Second, Kunda (1990) notes that accuracy motives lead to objective consideration of information relevant to the judgment at hand; thus, results under accuracy motivations provide a stark contrast, to other, directional motivations. Impression motives were selected because previously reported results on corporate social responsibility suggest that consumers can leverage it in order to achieve socially-oriented goals (Basil, Basil and Weber, 2006). Examining the impact of CSR information on product evaluations under impression motives also allows us to determine if the unexpected influence of product quality arguments under conditions that promote the use of less relevant information in Study 1 is a robust effect or an experimental artifact. The combined use of accuracy and impression motives moves us one step closer to completely examining the trifecta of motivations often discussed in the literature.
Accuracy motives often lead to the consideration of information that is most relevant to the judgment at hand. In contrast, impression motives often lead to the consideration of information that best serves activated social goals. Because of these differences in the type of information that is considered in processing, we predicted that impression and accuracy motives should lead to dissimilar usage of CSR information in generating product evaluations. CSR should be useful in meeting the social goals of impression-motivated participants, but should be considered less relevant for participants with accuracy motives. In their consideration of the theoretical benefits of social responsibility on brand equity, Hoeffler and Keller (2002) posit that engaging in CSR may lead to feelings of social approval. In their framework, social approval occurs when product attributes create a belief in consumers that others will view them more favorably based on their consumption of that product. Their postulates imply that consumers can strategically use CSR to influence others’ perceptions of them, garnering increased social approval through the purchase and support of CSR related products. We predicted that accuracy motivates would lead to reliance upon product quality information, which is more relevant than CSR in forming product evaluations. Alternatively, we expected that the product evaluations formed under impression motives to reflect reliance upon the less relevant, but socially relevant, CSR information.

Study 2 is also intended to address some of the shortcomings of Study 1. In Study 1 we used a proxy (cognitive ability) in attempt to manipulate levels of accuracy motivation, doing so prevents us from definitely establishing that our results stem directly from differences in levels of accuracy motivation. Study 2 attempts to address this concern by employing a different method to evoke motivation; rather than rely upon a proxy, motivation was primed directly using a scenario response task. Altering the motivation prime is expected to aid in clarifying the
results obtained in Study 1. Additionally, Study 2 attempts to expand the scope of the current investigation by considering a different product category and CSR information manipulation than Study 1 did. Lastly, Study 2 aims to reexamine the unexpected influence of product quality information in determining evaluations under conditions that typically engender the sole use of less relevant information.

Method

Design. The impact of motivated reasoning on the processing of CSR info was examined using a 2(motivation: impression vs. accuracy) x 2 (CSR involvement: high vs. low) x 2(product quality argument: strong vs. weak) factorial design. 201 participants, the majority of whom were undergraduate students at New York University, were recruited to participate via a web portal. Eighteen participants were removed from the dataset because they failed to complete all measures; as a result, our final dataset included 184 data points. The study was administered via the internet; participants who completed it were entered into a lottery for a $50 gift card.

Stimuli. Participants were randomly assigned to conditions and completed two purportedly unrelated studies. The first study contained the motive-priming task. Participants received either impression or accuracy motivation primes as per Chen, Schechter and Chaiken (1996). Participants were presented with two scenarios and asked to indicate how they would respond in the situations described. Scenarios in the accuracy primes emphasized objective processing of information and scenarios in the impression primes emphasized the importance of social norms in determining thoughts and actions. The second study contained the CSR and argument strength manipulations. All participants read information about Company XYZ, a firm that produces sunscreen, which contained manipulations of its CSR level. As in Study 1, a
fictitious firm was used to avoid different effects of brand knowledge. In the high (low) CSR condition, participants read that Company XYZ has (has not) sponsored the Relay for Life, a fundraising event hosted by the American Cancer Society, over the last ten years and will (has not yet decided to) donate 10% of the proceeds from the sale of every bottle of its new sunscreen to a local branch of the American Cancer Society. Pretests using participants from the same pool as the general study indicate that sunscreen and the American Cancer Society create an appropriate cause brand alliance, on a seven point scale measuring the goodness of fit, the combination was significantly better fit than the neutral point (M=5.2857, t(13)=6.185, p<.001).

Immediately after reading about the sunscreen manufacturer, participants evaluated the firm on three scales anchored by “very unfavorable” and “very favorable”, “very bad and “very good”, and “poor” and “excellent”. These scales combined to form the CSR involvement manipulation check. Participants then read a description of the new sunscreen that contains comparisons of three important and two unimportant attributes of competitors’ products (Agrawal & Maheswaran, 2005). In pretests, the important attributes for sunscreen were determined to be protection strength, water resistance, and application texture and the unimportant attributes were package type and size. In the strong product quality argument condition, participants read that the sunscreen outperformed the competition on the important attributes, but not the unimportant ones. By contrast, in the weak argument condition, participants read that the sunscreen outperformed the competition on the unimportant attributes, but not on the important ones. Pretests indicated that the product descriptions resulted in significantly different perceptions of quality; participants exposed to the strong product argument condition perceived the product to be better than those in the weak argument condition (M_{strong}=5.63, M_{weak}=3.7576, t(20)=3.872,
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After reading the product comparisons, participants completed dependent measures, the CSR perceptions scale, and provided demographic information.

**Dependent variables.** Participants evaluated the quality of the sunscreen on three scales anchored with favorable/unfavorable, good/bad, and desirable/undesirable. All dependent variables and manipulation checks for this study use seven-point semantic differential scales. They then responded to manipulation checks, covariates and demographic measures.

**Manipulation Checks.** In order to evaluate the legitimacy of the CSR involvement manipulation, participants completed the three-item the CSR involvement manipulation check. We depend on the results from Chen et al. (1996) to demonstrate the efficacy of the motivation manipulation.

**Results**

**Manipulation Checks.** The argument strength manipulation was tested separately in a pretest. Participants similar to those who completed the study evaluated the product rated in the strong argument condition as significantly more positive on a three item indexed quality scale than the product described in the weak argument condition (M\_strong=5.63, M\_weak=3.7576, t(20)=3.872, p=0.01). In a post-test an ANOVA on the three item indexed scale of manufacturer evaluations (α=.927) revealed main effects of CSR condition. Participants in the high (vs. low) CSR involvement condition reported greater levels of perceived CSR involvement (M\_high=4.997 vs. M\_low=3.29; F(1, 175)=90.087, p<.001). No other effects approached significance.

**Evaluations.** An ANOVA, on the indexed product evaluation measures (α=.940) yielded a significant effect of argument strength (M\_strong=5.889, M\_weak=4.072 F(1, 175)=83.9, p<.001)
and a marginally significant main effect of CSR ($M_{high}=5.173$, $M_{low}=4.788$ $F(1, 175)=3.772$, $p=.054$) and Motivation X CSR interaction ($F(1, 175)=3.43$, $p=.066$) These effects are qualified by a Motivation X CSR X Argument interaction ($F(1, 175)=5.032$, $p<.05$) (See Appendix A, Figure 2). Simple interaction effects are used to examine our hypotheses. Consistent with hypotheses 1a and 1b, under accuracy motives evaluations were significantly higher when product quality arguments were strong (vs. weak) ($M_{strong}=5.7958$, $M_{weak}=4.190$ $F(1, 175)=32.215$, $p<.001$) but did not differ significantly by involvement in CSR ($M_{high}=5.003$, $M_{low}=4.985$ $F(1, 175)=.004$, $p=.948$). Support was also provided for hypothesis 2; under impression motives there was a main effect of CSR ($M_{high}=5.43$, $M_{low}=4.591$ $F(1, 175)=7.424$ $p<.01$). More precisely, evaluations were significantly higher when CSR levels were high (vs. low). Additionally, there was also a main effect of product quality: evaluations were significantly higher when the sunscreen product quality arguments were strong (vs. weak) ($M_{strong}=5.981$ vs. $M_{weak}=3.953$; $F(1, 175)=53.997$ $p>.001$). These main effects are qualified by a CSR x argument interaction ($F(1, 175)=4.95$ $p<.05$). Simple effects replicate the findings of Study 1. While products that are affiliated with a CSR campaign are evaluated more positively than those that are not affiliated with a campaign when the product quality arguments were weak ($M_{high}=4.636$ vs. $M_{low}=3.270$; $F(1, 175)=12.883$ $p<.001$), this difference is not evidenced when the product quality arguments were strong ($M_{high}=6.050$ vs. $M_{low}=5.912$; $F(1, 175)<1$).

**Discussion**

In general, the findings of Study 2 substantiate those of Study 1. In the accuracy motivation condition, which was expected to elicit objective processing of relevant information, we again provide evidence that evaluations are influenced by product quality arguments. We also
find support for H1b: information regarding the level of CSR involvement of a firm bore no influence on product evaluations. In the impression motivation condition, which was expected to elicit biased processing in the favor of information that satisfies activated social goals, our results replicate the interdependence between CSR information and product quality evidenced earlier. Similar to the results in Study 1, we find that the influence of CSR is dependent upon the level of product argument strength. Although it provides support for our hypotheses, Study 2 does not address the entire multimotivational framework proposed in the HSM literature. In our examination of varying motivations, we have failed to consider the role of CSR information under defense motivations. Study 3 addresses this shortcoming.

STUDY 3

Study 3 examines the third motivation of interest: defense. Participants’ preferences were created and then information was provided that either corroborated or countered these preferences. Previous research has suggested that the mere existence of a preference is sufficient to elicit defense motives (Jain & Maheswaran, 2000). When defense motives are activated, a bias in the processing of information is introduced. Information that is in line with existing preferences receives special consideration, and the validity of information that runs counter to existing preferences is discounted and, in severe cases, completely dismissed.

Due to the differences in the processing of information that arise in the wake of defense motives, we predicted that products would be evaluated differently based on their CSR campaign affiliate charity. When both product quality and CSR information were available, we expected that the product evaluations would depend on the alignment of the affiliate charity with existing
preferences. Defense motives were expected to lead to reliance upon the less relevant CSR information when determining product evaluations. Therefore, in the face of a CSR campaign that includes a charity to which consumers were already positively disposed, evaluations were expected to be more favorable than those in the face of a CSR campaign that includes a charity that consumers did not prefer.

**Method**

*Design.* 96 undergraduate students at New York University participated in this study in exchange for partial course credit. They were randomly assigned to conditions within the 2 (preference: consistent vs. inconsistent) x 2 (product quality: strong vs. weak) factorial design. Eight participants failed to complete the entire study and were removed from consideration; the discussion below is based on the remaining 88 participants.

*Stimuli.* Adapting the experimental design of Jain and Maheswaran (2000), the study consisted of two parts. In the first part, two fictitious charitable organizations were presented to participants. The charities were described as sharing a focus on music education and having similar objectives and target audiences. Nonetheless, emphasis was placed on the independence of the charities; participants were informed that the organizations were funded and managed independently of one another. One charity (Charity A) served as the target. All participants received favorable information on the target. This information was presented via a description of the two charities as well as through survey results on the performance of both organizations. The descriptions contained a comparison between Charity A and Charity B on four important and four unimportant attributes. To create initial favorable dispositions toward the target charity (Charity A), all respondents were led to believe that Charity A outperformed Charity B on three
of the four important attributes and two of the four unimportant attributes. After reading the product descriptions, participants were exposed to results of a charity performance survey. The presented results indicated that the majority of stakeholders rated Charity A more favorably than Charity B on four out of six characteristics. This charity performance survey served to confirm subject’s prior expectations and create preference for Charity A. When taken together, these pieces of information were designed to create a preference for the target charity. After this preference was created, participants faced a donation scenario in which charity preference was elicited. Participants then evaluated the quality of the two charities on four scales anchored with favorable/unfavorable, good/bad, and desirable/undesirable, and helpful/unhelpful. Participants also indicated the intensity of their preference for the selected charity and listed four reasons that led to this preference. Listing reasons for a preference has been found to reinforce it (Jain and Maheshwaran, 2000).

In the second part of the study, participants were presented with information on a MP3 player being introduced to the market. Pretests indicated that MP3 players are familiar to the population in question and form appropriate CSR alliances with music education charities. When compared to the midpoint of a nine-point scale, participants reported being familiar with MP3 players (\(M_{MP3}=5.93\ t(40)=4.229, \ p<.001\)) and perceived the CSR combination of MP3 players and music education charities to be appropriate (\(M_{MP3/Music}=6.31\ t(40)=6.522, \ p<.001\)). The information on the MP3 player contained the preference consistency manipulation. In the preference-consistent condition, the manufacturer of the MP3 player reportedly donated a portion of the proceeds from the sale of every unit to the target charity; in the inconsistent condition, proceeds were donated to the non-target charity.
The information provided about the MP3 players also contained the product quality argument strength manipulation. Although similar, the presentation format of the product information varied from that in Study 1 in two distinct ways. First, based on participant feedback from the earlier study, two additional attributes, song capacity and file compatibility, were added to the product descriptions and voice recording capability was removed in order to create a more realistic product profile. Second, the information was presented without positioning the MP3 player against the competition. This change was implemented in effort to replicate the experimental design of Jain and Maheswaran (2000) more closely. Pretests and feedback from participants in previous studies suggested that the population participating in the study deemed battery life, file format compatibility, song capacity and memory to be the most important attributes when considering an MP3 player; therefore, these four attributes were varied to create the product argument manipulation while the remaining three attributes (size, accessory pack contents and color options) were held constant. In the strong argument condition, the MP3 player was described as performing exceptionally well on four of eight attributes. Alternatively, in the weak argument condition, performance on these four conditions was described as average. Performance on the remaining three attributes did not vary across conditions. To avoid income effects, price was also held constant across conditions. After reading the product information, participants completed dependent measures, manipulation checks and demographic information. A pretest involving 76 participants with similar demographic profiles as those that participated in the final study indicate that MP3 players in the strong (vs. weak) product quality argument condition were evaluated more favorably ($M_{\text{Strong}}=7.055$ $M_{\text{weak}}=6.014$ $F(1,74)=8.761, p<.01$).

**Dependent variables.** After reading the information on the MP3 player, participants evaluated the MP3 player using three scales anchored with good/bad, desirable/undesirable, and
favorable/unfavorable. All dependent variables for this study used nine-point scales. Participants then responded to manipulation checks, covariates, and demographic measures.

**Manipulation Checks.** The efficacy of the preference manipulation was captured in participants’ donation choices in the first part of the study. Decisions to support a charity serve as a proxy for preference for that charity. In order to evaluate the legitimacy of the CSR involvement manipulation, participants completed an adapted version of the CSR involvement scale used by Menon and Kahn (2003).

**Results**

**Manipulation Checks.** The preference creation manipulation worked as intended; 80% of participants stated preference for the target charity; this varies significantly from chance ($\chi^2(1, N = 88) = 30.727, p<0.001$). Additional support for the efficacy of the preference manipulation was obtained based on an analysis of the evaluations of the charities. The evaluation measures for each charity were reliably indexed ($\alpha_A=.893$ and $\alpha_B=.922$) and compared; participants evaluated the target charity, Charity A, significantly more favorably than the alternative ($M_A=7.108, M_B=6.524; t(87)=3.931, p<.001$).

Perceptions of CSR involvement, as measured by an indexed scale ($\alpha=.790$) did not vary by preference consistency condition, nor were they influenced by argument strength ($F<1$). This suggests that differences in charity evaluations did not stem from differences in perceptions of the charitable nature of the organizations but rather from the difference in preference.

**Evaluations.** An ANCOVA, using reported frequency of use of MP3 players as a covariate, on the indexed MP3 player evaluations ($\alpha=.934$) revealed significant main effects of strength of product quality argument ($M_A=6.957, M_B=5.645; F(1,83)=7.919, p<.01$); in general
participants evaluated MP3 players with strong quality arguments more favorably than those with weak quality arguments. Interpretation of this effect is qualified by a significant product quality argument x preference consistency interaction (F(1, 83) = 3.954, p = .05) (See Appendix A, Figure 3). Additional insights into these results were obtained through planned contrasts. When the MP3 player was described using weak product quality arguments, participants evaluated the MP3 player associated with the preferred charity more favorably than the MP3 player that was associated with the nonpreferred charity (M_A = 6.166, M_B = 5.124; F(1, 83) = 4.218, p < .05). However, this pattern did not hold when the MP3 player was described using strong quality arguments; in these conditions, there were no differences in product evaluations based on preference of affiliated charity. MP3 players associated with the alternative charity were evaluated as favorably as were those that were affiliated with the preferred charity (M_A = 6.437, M_B = 6.757; F(1, 83) = .517, p = .476). Combined, these results provide partial support for H3.

Although products with preference consistent (vs. inconsistent) CSR campaigns are evaluated more favorably in the presence of reduced product quality, the difference across CSR conditions do not hold when product quality arguments are strong.

Discussion

Study 3 extends the findings of the previous studies and provides further evidence for the influence of motivated reasoning in the processing of CSR information. The manipulation of defensive motivations completes the intended examination of the accuracy, impression and defense motivation trifecta. Our findings demonstrated that the preference consistency of CSR activities influenced evaluations. This is in line with predictions from the motivated reasoning literature; theory suggests that when defense motives are elicited, processing will be biased in the
favor of preference-consistent information. Similar to our earlier findings, results indicated an unexpected interaction; when defense motives were activated, reliance upon CSR information was a function of product quality. When paired with low quality products, preference-consistent CSR information led to more favorable evaluations than did non-preference consistent CSR information. However, when paired with high quality products, evaluations did not differ.

**GENERAL DISCUSSION**

Across three studies, we demonstrated strong differences in the usage of information pertaining to corporate social responsibility stemming from the activation of different motivations. These differences corresponded to the biases in information processing associated with motivated reasoning. The findings suggest that although CSR does not convey information about product performance and therefore is less relevant than product quality information, under the influence of motivations that engender biased information processing, it can have a greater impact than product quality information in determining product evaluations. As such, providing the same information can lead to divergent product evaluations depending upon active motives. Moreover, results from each of the studies point to an interaction between product quality and CSR information such that use of CSR information not only depends upon the activated motive but also the quality of the product in question.

Study 1 showed that, consistent with the different processing objectives associated with high and low accuracy motivation, high ability motives led to the independent consideration of all information while low accuracy motives led to biased and interdependent consideration of information. High accuracy motivation (as proxied by high ability) lead to consideration of the most relevant information available and resulted in improved evaluations for high- (vs. low-)
quality products. Low accuracy motivation (as proxied by low ability) lead to consideration of both relevant and irrelevant information, resulting in varied evaluations for low quality products with high and low CSR involvement campaigns, but, equivalent evaluations for high quality products regardless of CSR involvement. Study 2 showed that, as opposed to accuracy motivations, impression motivations lead to reliance upon CSR information in determining evaluations. While accuracy motivations resulted in reliance upon the most relevant information available—product quality—impression motivations resulted in reliance on the interdependence of CSR information and product quality. When product quality was low, CSR associations increased evaluations; however, there was no difference in product evaluations based on levels of CSR when product quality was high. Study 3 demonstrated that, like impression motivation, defense motivation can also bias processing in the favor of CSR information. When preferences are already established, products with CSR campaigns that include preferred components were evaluated more favorably than campaigns that do not, but only when product quality was reduced. When product quality was high, products were evaluated equally. Across all three studies our results evidence the influence of product quality under conditions predicted to result in the reliance upon CSR information in determining product evaluations. In particular, under conditions that engender biased processing we found that CSR information was only used to determine evaluations when product quality arguments were weak.

**Theoretical and Practical Implications**

A consideration of activated motives may offer resolution to the discrepant findings on the impact of CSR on product evaluations. In the two out of three of three studies in which they found that CSR failed to influence product evaluations, Brown and Dacin (1997) employed a cover story that suggested that participants’ responses would be used in designing a new type of
company profile that for use by investors. Presumably, a suggestion that their responses would impact decisions as important as investments could lead participants to activate a goal to be accurate. In the singular study in which they found a direct influence of CSR on product evaluations, the authors examined responses to information about a product related to the consumption of medicine. Within an undergraduate sample, assumed to be youthful and of good health, it can be assumed that involvement in evaluations of such a product would be minimal; thereby, the manipulation may have lead to low accuracy motivation and reduction in objective processing. Similarly, much of the research on CSR that suggests it influences attitudes, intentions, or behaviors is conducted under low accuracy motivation conditions. One representative example is Creyer and Ross’s (1997) finding that CSR impacts the price that consumers are willing to pay for products, which stems from survey data; an oft-voiced concern about the collection of survey data is the reduced involvement/motivation level of respondents.

Support for our proposed hypotheses and reported results can be found in the work of Handelman and Arnold (1999). Their results indicate that although inferior products are evaluated less positively than superior products when a firm does not engage in CSR, this difference is reduced when a firm does engage in it. More specifically, firms that manufacture inferior products enjoy a greater increase in evaluations as a result of CSR involvement than do firms that make superior products. This data was collected using mall intercept techniques combined with videos; as such, it can be assumed that involvement levels were low.

The results reported herein suggest the viability of predicting people’s reliance on CSR information in formulating evaluations on the basis of activated motives. Nonetheless, the influence of information that is more relevant to performance must also be taken into account. This information is capable of mitigating the influence of CSR information, even under
conditions that are amenable to its usage. The present research suggests that prediction of the usage of CSR information can be significantly improved by knowing both the relative quality of a product and the active motivation of the consumer.

Practically, these findings can be used by consumers, consumer advocates, and/or firms. Armed with information about the impact of motivated reasoning on their response to CSR affiliated products, consumers would be better able to exert control over the process and make purchase decisions that reflect their actual desires. Similarly, results from this work can assist consumer advocates in protecting consumers from unwittingly forming attitudes and purchase intentions based only CSR activities of firms. Conversely, these findings can be used by firms to better predict how consumer motivations determine responses to products based on levels of CSR involvement and product quality.

CAVEATS & LIMITATIONS

As a preliminary foray into the investigation of the intersection of motivated reasoning the usage of CSR information, the present research is not without its limitations. Most notably, some reported research appears to directly contradict the results reported herein. The results of Folkes and Kamins (1999) seem to run counter to those evidenced in Studies 1 & 2. They found that when a product is inferior to that of its competition, there is no difference in evaluation of the firm depending on the level of a firm’s prosocial involvement. However, when a product was superior to competition they found that a firm that actively engaged in prosocial behavior was evaluated more positively than one that simply refrained from transgressions of social responsibility. Although these results seem to contradict the theory and results presented here, there are marked differences that may account for these discrepancies. Most notably, the present undertaking examines the influence on product evaluations whereas Folkes and Kamins (1999)
focus on evaluations of the firm. Earlier work in the area of corporate social responsibility suggests the possibility of disparate impact on information on product versus firm evaluations (Brown and Dacin, 1997; Sen and Bhattacharya, 2000). Additionally, the work by Folkes and Kamins considers two different types of prosocial behavior (active and passive), while the present work focuses on active prosocial behavior; Study 1 considers varying levels of CSR involvement while Study 2 considers the presence versus absence of prosocial behavior. This difference is not insignificant and may be the source of the divergence in results. Lastly, the level of motivation/involvement of participants is not easily discerned in Folkes and Kamins’ (1999) research. Their stimuli focuses on telephones, an object selected based on its high familiarity and importance to the studied population, but no information is provided to determine if the instructions given to participants were sufficient to elicit motivated reasoning.

If it is assumed that the influence of impression motives in Study 2 is a result of social norms, the reported findings of the influence of the impact of CSR information on evaluations under conditions in which impression motives are activated appears to contradict the work by Osterhus (1997). Based on Schwarz’s (1977) model of altruistic behavior, Osterhus (1997) hypothesizes that social norms should influence behavior directly and indirectly through the internalization of personal norms. Reported results support the indirect influence of social norms through the internalization of personal norms; however, they fail to provide support for the assumption that social norms directly influence behavior. A number of circumstances may have led to the failure to verify the direct influence of social norms: the CSR act considered by participants was novel and bore very little resemblance to options consumers may have previously experienced permitting for the nonexistence of associated social norms and the data violated assumptions of normalcy and as a result, analysis techniques employed increase the
difficulty of revealing significant results. Although we report different results, our theorizing is similar and it is expected that increased levels of familiarity with CSR due to increased instances in the marketplace may explain the differences in our results.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the present research shows that motivated reasoning is capable of generating diverse, and sometimes opposing, effects on the usage of CSR information in determining product evaluation, depending on the particular motivation and the relative quality of the product being considered. These results augment the work on both motivated reasoning and corporate social responsibility. Our evidence suggests that CSR does indeed directly influence evaluations of products. Presented results also suggest that motivated reasoning impacts the usage of CSR information; however, these effects depend on product quality. The growing number of firms that are engaging in CSR activities and consumers who are aware of these activities suggests not only the importance of understanding how CSR information influences evaluations but also the way it interacts with motivation and other available information.
APPENDIX A

FIGURE 1. Study 1 (High versus Low Ability as a proxy for Accuracy Motivation) Results
FIGURE 2. Study 2 (Accuracy versus Impression Motivation) Results
FIGURE 3. Study 3 (Defense Motivations) Results
### APPENDIX B

Adapted CSR Involvement Scale used by Menon and Kahn (2003)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The company is:</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Genuinely concerned about consumer welfare</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Believes in giving generously to worthy causes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Likely to follow employee-friendly rules and policies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Highly involved in community issues</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Highly concerned about environmental issues</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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REFERENCES


