The influence of CSR practices on “New Look” brand equity and how to effectively communicate it to customers in Ireland

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MSc in International Business Management

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Candidate Declaration

Candidate Name:

I certify that the dissertation entitled:

submitted for the degree of: **MSc in Programme Name here** is the result of the my own work and that where reference is made to the work of others, due acknowledgment is given.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to God, my creator, my rock, my source of wisdom and understanding that throughout this project, was a source of strength for me. I also dedicate my work to my family, particularly my mother, Celia, who has always encouraged me and ensured that I would not only finish it but would give my all. Thank you to my sister Talita and closest friends Fran and Ellen for their encouragement and belief in me. A big thank you to my fiance, who has been my support during the last stages of the project.

Thank you very much. My feelings for you are immeasurable. God bless you

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Abstract

The influence of CSR practices on "New Look" brand equity as well as how effectively communicate it to customers in Ireland.

Tatiana M R De M Santos

Despite the fact that more organizations are adhering to and proving their commitment to CSR, many are still trying to figure out what to say and how to say it without coming across as self-serving or generate stakeholder's skepticism. In addition to that, companies are unsure of the extent of the influence that CSR practices and their communication would have on the company`s brand equity.

The present research, aimed to assess the influence of CSR practices on "New Look" brand equity as well as how to effectively communicate it to customers in Ireland. In order to do so, this research focused on four main objectives; (1) Evaluate the influence of Corporate Social Responsibility on the brand equity of "New Look" (2) Assess the company`s perspective and strategy in terms of CSR practices (3) Assess the company`s current CSR communication strategy (4) To explore how to effectively communicate CSR to customers.

This research was taken from an interpretivist point of view. Therefore, the subjectivity of human behaviour and perceptions were analysed by an inductive perspective using a qualitative method. The qualitative findings were explored through interviews based on the research objective and conceptual framework. The interviews were conducted through both asynchronous email and Zoom app methods with a sample size of fourteen participants who were recruited through the "New Look" LinkedIn page.

The findings concerning the influence of CSR practices on "New Look" brand equity has suggested that it does influence brand equity as it has been presented by the researcher in the literature review chapter. However, variables such as customer`s perspective, awareness, level of interest, brand reputation and skepticism were found to be factors that might affect the extent to which CSR influences brand equity. As a result, the level to each variable might impact brand equity was found to be inconclusive.

In summary, the majority of the findings reaffirmed the literature presented by this research and it might contribute to the academic topic concerning the CSR practices and their influence on brand equity. Also, it will contribute to the company under study to better evaluate its strategy and approaches towards CSR practices and communications.

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1. Introduction

Despite the growing importance of corporate social responsibility, its influence on brand equity is still relatively unexplored (Carroll, 2008) (Levillain *et al.*, 2019). In order to do so, this dissertation will critically review the literature concerning CSR practices and its communications in order to evaluate what is the potential influence on brand equity as well as how to communicate it effectively to customers.

Therefore, this chapter will deal with introducing the research subject of the influence of CSR practices on brand equity and the reasons why CSR practices and its communications are relevant to the organization. Furthermore, it will present an overview of the research context which describes the business environment for the research. The chapter ends with a summary of the research structure as well as the study's purpose and objectives, which serve as the foundation for the remaining chapters.

1.1 Overview

The "New Look" journey began 40 years ago, and the company has shown consistent growth and global expansion since then. It has grown into a major fast-fashion brand as a result of the company's strategy, having 519 stores in the UK and Ireland. The key company`s values are “keep it simple, be brave, think customer, act with pace, and take responsibility,” which is supported by its code of ethics, which stipulates suppliers who do business with “New Look” must demonstrate a clear commitment to attaining the sustainability goals.

As mentioned, the influence of CSR practices is relatively unexplored, therefore the author found it relevant to understand how the current “New look” CSR practices have on its brand equity. Besides, according to Mintel (2021), as a result of changing customer behaviour, the concept of a moral brand and a more environmentally responsible company is rapidly growing in Ireland and throughout the world. In fact, according to data, 75% of Irish consumers attempt to operate in an environmentally friendly manner. The Holistic Consumer (2020 cited by Mintel, 2020). As a result, this dissertation will be assessing the customer and company perspectives in relation to “New Look” CSR practices. In addition, it will focus on the customer response to “New Look” current CSR communications, as well as assess the company's viewpoint on its communication in order to get insights into how to communicate it effectively to customers.

In short, in order to avoid gaps and provide more accurate and reality-based findings the primary data collection will be limited to the Republic of Ireland. Although the findings will be focused on consumers in Ireland, the findings and suggestions might contribute to the scholarly field and provide insights to similar businesses.

1.2 Research Purpose

The purpose of this dissertation is to contribute to the literature about the influence of CSR practices on brand equity as well as how to communicate it effectively to customers. In order to do so, the author will conduct a case study on the company "New Look" by addressing the study goals through the evaluation of theories and frameworks related to CSR activities as a possible influencer and instrument for improving brand equity. Moreover, it will be evaluating potential marketing tools that when aligned to CSR might improve the communications to customers.

In short, besides contributing to the scholarly field, the findings might assist the company under study to gain a better understanding of current and emerging customer behaviors in terms of CSR activities, as well as what is one of the marketing tools available that could aid in the delivery of CSR communication thus potential development of brand equity. (Madhavaram *et al.*, 2005; Vallaster *et al.*, 2012; Nazri *et al.*, 2018).

1.3 Significance of the Study

According to the World Economic Forum (2020), environmental and societal issues are two of the most significant global risks in terms of impact. As a result, consumer behavior is likely to change in the future (Euro Monitor International, 2020), and their decisions will be based mainly on the impact on the world and society implying that broad environmental and social responses will play an even bigger role. In fact, according to Carroll (2008), the conceptualisation of CSR has developed, expressed itself, and boomed by concentrating on the expectations and perspectives of the company's stakeholders. Due to the pressures of global competitiveness, which will continue to strengthen, CSR practices are eventually moving in many firms toward deeper integration with strategic management, driving CSR to the forefront of attention (Madhavaram *et al.*, 2005; Carroll, 2008; Vallaster *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, it is critical to assess the influence of CSR practices on the company's brand equity and how to improve its communications to customers, so the company can apply strategies to increase and/or maintain competitive advantage thus foster company longevity.

Another significant factor is related to cancel culture, which is described as a customer-led system of checks and balances on brands, and according to Mintel (2021), it has been leading to a bigger change in the buying process. The reason for that is because CSR awareness has increased, but also in today`s reality in easier for the customers to access the company`s activities and positioning in the market. As a consequence, it has given a bigger power to the customers over the purchasing process but also it generates a bigger impact on overall the company`s brand equity. In fact, according to Gartner (2019), the boycott of Dolce & Gabbana following the brand's catastrophic China downfall was the most visible demonstration of the power of cancel culture in the past few years. Consequently, Dolce & Gabbana suffered internet outrage, in addition to other negative consequences for the brand equity.

Although some empirical investigations have been carried on the effect of CSR practices on a company's brand, the majority of these studies presented limitations and different variables, which is mainly linked to the business environment, customer`s perspective or even the current company reputation (Peloza and Papania, 2008; Sweeney and Coughlan, 2008; Villagra *et al.*, 2016; Bögel, 2019). Therefore, it justifies the need for research to fill the gap by concentrating on a specific company in order to generate a more accurate finding.

1.4 Research Objective

The study will involve an exploratory case study at "New Look" and will be carried out with four main objectives. These four objectives are as follows:

1. Evaluate the influence of Corporate Social Responsibility on the brand equity of "New Look".

2. Assess the company`s perspective and strategy in terms of CSR practices.

3. Assess the company`s current CSR communication strategy.

4. To explore how to effectively communicate CSR to customers.

In summary, by conducting this research in accordance with these objectives, the author expects to provide useful findings and discussions that might provide the company`s management with a broader understanding of the influence of CSR practices on brand equity as well as how to effectively communicate CSR practices to customers in order to enhance the company's brand equity by strategically leveraging CSR practice through effective communication.

1.5 Structure of the study

This dissertation is divided into five chapters, the first of which will offer an overview of the topic, followed by chapter two, which will present the literature review, which will be critically assessed by examining the key background and issues surrounding CSR practices. In addition, based on the variables identified in the literature, this chapter will propose a conceptual framework. The methodology used to produce this dissertation, as well as the methods for analyzing the data, will be discussed in chapter three. In chapter four, the main findings and discussion will be presented together. In chapter five, the study's limitations and recommendations for further research will be presented.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will focus on presenting CSR backgrounds and underlying issues, since, despite the widely held assumption that CSR assists companies to satisfy their stakeholder expectations, there are still a number of study gaps that are directly linked mainly in relation to the customer's evaluation of the brand, which will depend on the company's past and current reputation and customer`s expectations as well as whether the CSR practices are consistent and how well they are communicated (Peloza and Papania, 2008; Carroll, 2008; Bögel, 2019).

Therefore, after presenting useful background and highlight some gaps in previous studies, this chapter will deal with establishing the link between brand reputation and brand equity, since the concept of reputation is based on a stakeholder's beliefs and evaluations of a company's behavior, thus a company's reputation might have a positive or negative effect on the overall brand equity. (Rugimbana *et al.*, 2008). Besides that, CSR practices will be presented as a potential moderator to impact positively both brand reputation and brand equity. Following that, this chapter will focus on how to effectively communicate CSR practices in order to avoid skepticism. Moreover, this chapter will be dealing with presenting useful marketing strategies which when aligned with CSR dimension communications can aid in boosting brand equity. Aside from presenting the strategy, it will be present the potential benefits and implementations challenges when applying the strategy.

2.2 Overview

Despite the fact that more organizations are adhering to and proving their commitment to CSR, many are still trying to figure out what to say and how to say it without coming across as self-serving or generate stakeholder's skepticism. (Bögel, 2019). In addition to that, companies are unsure of the extent of the influence that CSR practices and their communication would have on the company`s brand equity. According to the instrumental stakeholder theory, CSR plays an important role when creating a competitive advantage. On the one hand, this is because stakeholders have become adept at measuring the company's social practices. On the other hand, while the theory can assist a company to improve its stakeholder relationships, it may fail to tackle the issue of balancing conflicting interests between internal and external stakeholders if used solely. Therefore, in order to improve brand equity through CSR practices, the company might have to take into account variables such as brand reputation (Barnett, 2007), which have emerged as one of the most critical aspects of the core business (Porter and Kramer, 2006).

In fact, in today's business environment, brand equity, which represents the relationship between an organization and its stakeholders (Venger and Pomirleanu, 2018) can be defined as can be defined as an approach to establishing a safety net during challenging circumstances. It may help a company get through challenging times, such as product failures or security breaches Aaker (1991). If it is sufficiently powerful, it may guarantee that a brand thrives while others would not. Therefore, the brand reputation subject has become even more important since if not well managed can eventually lower the company`s results.

According to Aaker (1991), the company creates value not only by delivering high-quality products but also by establishing strong consumer perceptions through effective communication and marketing strategies. Therefore, in order to successfully leverage CSR practices would have to be linked to CSR approaches in order to build long-term value by engaging constantly with its stakeholders (Sweeney and Coughlan, 2008). Although is broadly assumed that brand strategy aligned with CSR can boost brand equity, previous studies such as those led by Kim and Lee (2018); Venger and Pomirleanu (2018); Srivastava (2019); Bögel, (2019) and Peloza and Papania (2008) have shown that in addition to, the company's brand reputation, customers' level of interest, awareness, and perception is one of the variables that must be considered when applying CSR practices strategically.

Besides variables mentioned above, there are also potential challenges when communicating CSR practices that will be mainly related to skepticism that as exemplified in the work undertaken by Venger and Pomirleanu (2018), Bögel (2019) and Bowd *et al(*2006) it is one of the common limitations gaps of clarity on whether CSR communication factors can improve the CSR strategy in order to generate positive outcomes towards brand equity. Therefore, the following chapters will be explored the variables that might impact the level of influence of CSR on brand equity as well as the challenges of communicating it to customers.

2.3 CSR – Background and underlying issues

However, despite the widely held assumption that CSR assists firms to satisfy their stakeholder expectations, there are still a number of study gaps that are directly linked mainly in relation to the customer's evaluation of the brand, which will depend on the company's past and current reputation, (Bögel, 2019) as well as whether the CSR practices are consistent and how well they are communicated (Sweeney and Coughlan, 2008). Besides, although has increased the awareness of CSR practices by the consumers, (He and Lai, 2014) the majority of customers do not research about the company`s CSR or even could potentially not give high importance to the brand based on its CSR practices.

Previous studies have presented limitations and different variables concerning the business environment, which could lead to different customer`s expectations. (Xiaoli Nan and Kwangjun Heo, 2007; Sweeney and Coughlan, 2008; Villagra *et al.*, 2016). In fact, Smith (2008) argues that in addition to measuring consumer perspective associated with competitive consumer marketplaces, the author proposed that the area of consumer sovereignty might expand beyond the more evident qualities of the product to encompass the company's corporate social responsibility activities, as a result, pressure groups, and customers' expectations could significantly affect the company`s brand equity.

Although the author discusses an important point, it is also crucial to note that brand equity can be influenced by customers' perspectives, levels of interest, and awareness in terms of CSR practices, Kim and Lee (2018); Venger and Pomirleanu (2018); Srivastava (2019); and Peloza and Papania (2008) which according to Bögel (2019) can be related to the company's current and past reputation. Therefore, the evidence presented in previous researches supports the idea that when analysing CSR practices from a specific business environment also taking into account customers perspectives and expectations, can allow a more precise analysis of the potential opportunities also shortcomings when communicating CSR practices.

Consequently, while assessing potential possibilities and threats in CSR practices, it is critical to look at the business trends and customer behavior to analyze changes, prospects, and concerns. According to Mintel (2021), brands from all sectors are pledging to become more environmentally friendly and thereby increase their CSR activities, in fact, it is mentioned that Primark, for instance, is one of the fashion retailers that has committed to reducing its carbon footprint by 30% by 2030, in addition to doubling the number of items manufactured from recycled materials over the next two years.

Meanwhile, customers are reinforcing these approaches by insisting that brands behave responsibly. However, as pointed out by Mintel Moral Brands Trend (2020), these customers' expectations of the company mean that they care, does not imply that they are instinctively altruistic or that they are often able to make sacrifices for a good cause many customers expect businesses to go above and beyond in order to support a good cause. In fact, according to Post et al (2002 p.10 cited by Peloza and Papania, 2008), the stakeholder's perception of CSR activities tends to shift over time due to change of priorities across different stakeholder groups, also due to new issues of relevance. Besides, according to World Economic Forum (2020), CSR has become a significant aspect in determining whether a company's brand equity is expanding or decreasing.

In summary, the major takeaway from the customer-related trend is that social and environmental issues are rising quickly, and CSR practices may be a means of improving a company's ability to foresee, anticipate, and adapt to changes and challenges in order to ensure long-term success. However, in order to do so, the variables when developing brand equity through CSR must be taken into account. Therefore, the following chapter will be discussing the importance of considering one of the main variables when developing CSR practices in order to aid in maintaining sustainable and strong brand equity.

2.4 The relationship between brand reputation and brand equity

Brand equity is defined by Aaker (1991) as a combination of brand assets and liabilities associated with a brand, therefore, name, symbol, as well as reputation can add to or deduct from the value generated by a product. Eventually, the author identified that brand equity could be analyzed under five pillars, such as brand awareness; brand perceived quality; brand associations; brand loyalty; and other proprietary brands assets, for instance, patents, channel relationships, etc. (See figure 1).

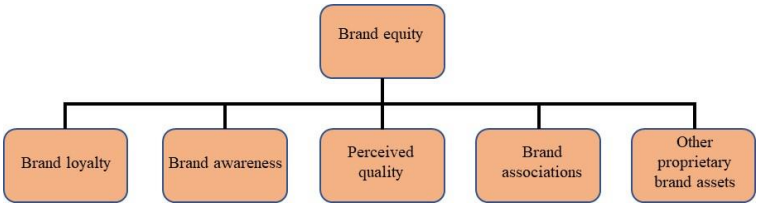

Figure.1 Brand Equity model (Aaker, 1991).

The model developed by Aaker (1991) represented in figure 1 shows all categories of brand equity that have a different context, for example, brand loyalty has an important role when developing brand equity, because it is embedded a range of brand association, that represents the company`s core value. On the other hand, when it comes to starting the process of creating a brand, brand awareness is a must, this is because it comes before any attempts to change a customer`s mind about the company`s product. In short, since the other dimensions of brand equity all have an effect on brand loyalty, brand loyalty is at the heart of brand equity.

Although this model can be utilized as a tool to better manage brand equity, it is uncertain if the company would get the same results if each individual brand component was applied independently. Having said that, this study will focus mainly on the overall brand equity in order to encompass each individual dimension of brand equity and therefore potentialize the approach by connecting with linkages of multiple types and degrees of association.

According to Mahmood and Bashir (2020) brand, strategy investment is becoming more important, as brand equity enhancement can potentially boost the brand value and different dimensions of brand equity. However, when developing brand equity is crucial to evaluate the company`s reputation which could influence directly or indirectly in the process. According to empirical studies led by Elving (2013) and Barnett (2007) and Syed Alwi *et al.*(2017) customer experience, product quality, as well as projects related to corporate philanthropy, and minority support initiatives all contribute to the company's reputation, which in turn can affect company`s brand equity. In fact, according to Syed Alwi *et al.* (2017), it is assumed that when customers are making purchasing decisions, price and quality is sometimes insufficient to aid the customers during the process. Eventually, intangible attributes such as customer trust, association with brand equity elements such as image, loyalty as well as the company`s reputation are also very important. Bögel (2019) adds to the subject stating that the reputation factor was found to be short-term growth which will depend on ongoing CSR practices.

After all, things considered, once the idea of reputation is based on a stakeholder's beliefs and evaluations of a company's behavior, a company's reputation can have a positive or negative effect on the overall brand equity. In other words, brand reputation is built in the long-term and once established it can provide the business with long-term value in its intangible asset (Aaker, 1996). Therefore, the literature demonstrates that brand reputation is an important factor when building brand equity and can highly influence the company`s competitive advantage. As consequence, it can aid during the customer`s purchasing decision by creating a competitive advantage not only related to the product quality but also projects related to corporate philanthropy, and minority support initiatives, etc. Besides, Jurisic and Azevedo (2011), argues that enhancing brand reputation may also lead to increased consumer loyalty thus improvement of brand equity.

However, it is important to note that Jurisic and Azevedo (2011) made no attempt to account for the impact that the firm's prior reputation may have on the customer's evaluation of the organization. Whereas Bögel (2019) noted that in order to cover research gaps, this variable must be taken into consideration, otherwise it may result in gaps in the research findings, since a company's negative historical reputation may cause more distrust among customers.

In fact, according to Bögel (2019) findings, it is assumed that past bad company`s reputation on the assessment of CSR information is significantly reduced the second time customers are introduced to it. Besides, after it was tested hypothesis, it is believed that customers' trust in companies' CSR practices rises in cases of constant CSR activities and active communication, even though companies had prior negative reputations. Although this particular study indicates that CSR practices and their communications can significantly improve the company`s brand equity, it also pointed out by the author that the positive effect might be short-lived. This means that if customers are exposed again to negative information about the company, the CSR returns will potentially decrease.

In summary, the reputation that the company develop and builds up over time becomes a valuable strategic asset to the firm not only because of its direct effect on the company`s brand equity but it can also enable the company to generate lasting value. Having said that, since CSR is defined as a business's social responsibility that incorporates the economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic that the stakeholders have in the company (Brüggenwirth, 2006), it usually aims to achieve, on the one hand, societal improvements and, on the other hand, competitive advantages, that means that in order to develop the company's brand

equity, CSR will work as a moderator to impact both reputation and brand equity positively (Srivastava, 2019).

Consequently, besides analysing brand reputation factors, in order to successfully develop brand equity, it is crucial to take into account the company`s prior and current reputation in order to have a broader view thus be able to evaluate what are the factors that could rise customer skepticism and how the company can overcome them when communicating CSR practices. Therefore, the next chapter will address what are the main CSR dimensions of communications to be considered in order to minimize consumer skepticism while simultaneously maintaining a positive brand reputation and thus building strong sustainable brand equity.

2.5 CSR communication and customers skepticism

Although firms are strengthening CSR operations to better position themselves in the perspective of customers and other stakeholders by sharing their actions through annual reports and websites, it is critical to identify essential CSR communication strategies to avoid customer skepticism (Carroll, 2008). The reason for this is that some studies are still discussing whether companies should communicate about social activities, and if they do, what would be the most feasible and effective marketing strategy, because when it is communicated, it does not always benefit the companies, due to stakeholder skepticism. Bögel (2019). This is exemplified in the work undertaken by Barnett (2007) and Syed Alwi *et al.*(2017) which highlight that skepticism might be one of the common limitations gaps of clarity on whether CSR communication factors can improve the CSR strategy in order to generate positive outcomes towards brand equity. It is commonly agreed by the authors that the company`s reputation can generate customers` skepticism thus it is necessary to take into account the main CSR dimensions of communications in order to minimize it but also aid the company to build more sustainable brand equity.

Having said that, according to a study led by Kim and Ferguson (2018), it is critical to consider moderators' elements when it comes to CSR communication. the author's six CSR communications dimensions are presented in Figure 2 below, which according to the author should be considered before delivering the communications.

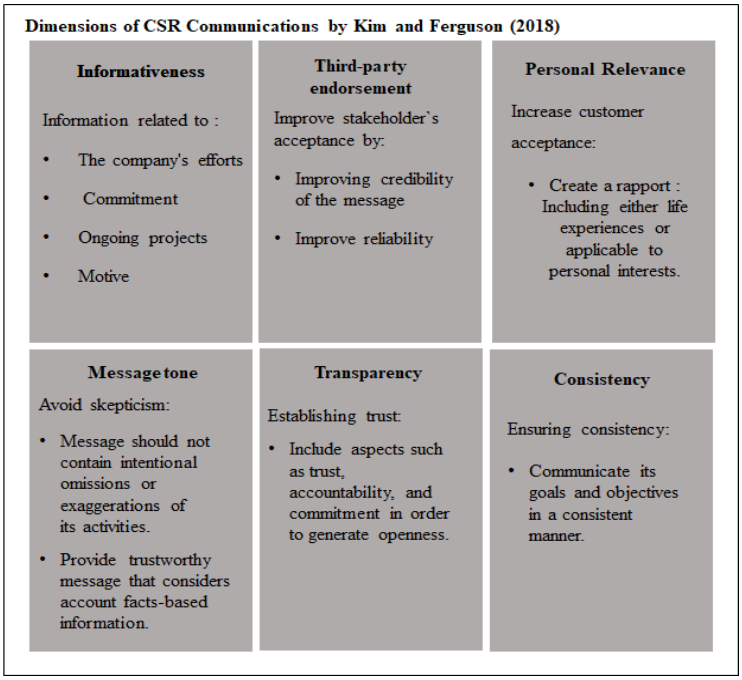

Figure 2. Dimensions of CSR communications (Kim and Fergus, 2018)

Although the authors' approach may be used to assess customer expectations and responses to CSR initiatives, data analysis eliminated some elements such as frequency communication, which the authors define as the balance of communications exposure, and self-efficacy, which is linked to a persuasive message in order to illustrate the customer's desired outcomes. As a result, the study may have limits in terms of the range of parameters examined, as these elements may have a significant impact in a different business context, culture, or other location.

Despite limitations, the author's assumption is reinforced by Dawkins (2004) which claims that factors, such as transparency, message tone, and consistency, are some of the ways to produce effective communications on corporate social responsibility matters. Apart from incorporating these elements, Morsing and Schultz (2006) emphasize the need of not just informing and responding, but also involving stakeholders by maintaining progressive iterations in order to enhance the efforts and create legitimacy.

These arguments are similar to those reported by Schmeltz (2017), who explains that companies might overcome the difficulties of communicating CSR by ensuring a clear relationship between the company's core identity, stakeholders and the cause addressed in the CSR activities. This concept is linked to Guzmán and Becker-Olsen (2010, p. 02 cited by Schmeltz, 2017) definition, which claims that CSR strategy is incorporating CSR into a company's strategic planning to maximize economic and social benefit. Therefore, it is

assumed that in order to maximize outcomes when communicating CSR practices, it is important to establish a strategy to aid in overcoming the challenges concerning skepticism and low credibility.

Despite the fact that these studies provide helpful insights into the challenges and solutions faced while communicating CSR practices. It is important to highlight that measuring CSR communication may be challenging due to extensive data that will be required, which may be costly for the company to collect. Aside from CSR communication dimensions, elements such as brand reputation and customer evaluations may also be considered when communicating CSR activities, once it might have an influence on the outcomes. In brief, when the dimensions of CSR communications are applied, consumers' protective mechanisms may be eased; moreover, this method may assure excellent practices and a customer-centered approach by taking into consideration customer expectations.

2.6 CSR practices as brand strategy

Despite the present attractiveness of the use of CSR as a brand strategy, as previously described in the preceding chapter, CSR communications can be a risky endeavor. Therefore, in addition to considering the dimensions of CSR communications in order to avoid customer skepticism, this chapter will focus on showing how the company can strategically leverage CSR practices as a CSR-related branding strategy.

Because branding strategy has its own framework, it requires different perspectives on how to handle CSR-related challenges thus in order to be able to create a customer`s brand by meeting society's social needs it is important to align both CSR practices and brand management. (Vallaster *et al.*, 2012). Previous studies have investigated the co-relation of CSR and brand strategy. Indeed, an empirical study led by Singh and Verma (2018) concluded that through CSR practices, the company can generate not only advantageous stakeholder behaviors, but also, in the longer term, build brand equity, enhance stakeholder–company relationships, and improve stakeholders' advocacy behaviors.

The author also mentions how stakeholders' lack of awareness and skepticism about CSR initiatives limits businesses' ability to reap the advantages of CSR investment. If a CSR initiative is properly communicated to the targeted stakeholders, it might provide tangible or intangible benefits for the company. (Singh and Verma, 2017). Similarly, Holt *et al.*, (2004) suggest that social responsibility is a significant driver of brand assessments by socially

aware customers. However, the authors highlight that the credibility of such practices is the main driving factor behind CSR as a brand strategy.

Having, all things considered, while these studies can help evaluate the influence of CSR on brand equity and how to leverage CSR by communicating effectively to customers, it is important to note that, like any other research, they have some limitations. First, the findings may provide different outcomes when used in a different business environment from the one explored in these researches. Second, these research does not take into consideration the perspectives of different groups of stakeholders, which means that when analyzing in particular customer`s behaviour based on their economic status, cultures, beliefs, and lifestyles, the results might show gaps.

Therefore according to Vallaster *et al.*, (2012) from a brand strategy standpoint, a CSR approach should be based on aspects of the brand equity also themes that interacts with all key stakeholder groups. This view is supported by Jones (2005), who argues that brand equity is linked to NGOs, the media, and customers, implying that these stakeholders' expectations will influence brand equity outcomes. Therefore, the author suggests the Daisywheel model of brand equities (See Figure 3), that deals with the evaluation of the company`s stakeholders and their expectations.

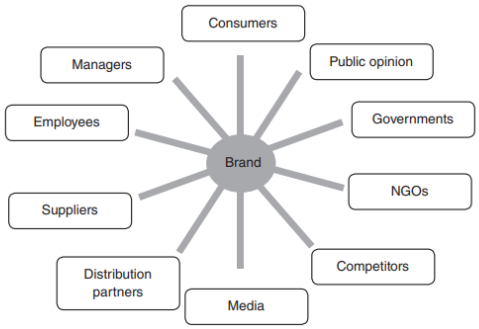

Figure 3. Daisywheel model of brand equities (Jones, 2005).

Jones' daisywheel model allows the company to have a larger picture of its stakeholders, which might potentially influence brand equity outcomes. However, in order to apply the model on a daily basis, it would be more appropriate to focus on every single stakeholder`s group at a time in order to draw a detailed strategy while taking into account internal and external factors. As a result, it will enable to evaluate what are the stakeholders' expectations and needs in order to generate positive outcomes.

As previous mentioned, CSR plays an important role when developing brand equity, once stakeholders have become adept at measuring the company for the social practices that it

employs. As a result, CSR practices have emerged as one of the most critical aspects of the core business (Porter and Kramer, 2006). In fact, an empirical study led by Venger and Pomirleanu (2018) shows the relationships between CSR practices and multiple organizational performance measures, which demonstrated CSR activities help to increase brand reputation, thereby assisting in the development of brand equity.

Although this empirical study presents useful insights about applying CSR as a branding strategy approach, it was pointed out by the authors that it is critical to establish clear steps in order to develop the brand positioning based on the needs of the company and its customers. The reason for that according to Peloza & Shang (2011, p.03 cited by Venger and Pomirleanu, 2018), is that stakeholders do not see CSR activities in the same way besides, different target audiences have different facts expectations while evaluating them.

Therefore, in order to create clear steps for the communication process Brüggenwirth (2006)

suggests a model that assesses the relevance of CSR in the company's brand positioning, as well as the opportunities related to CSR that may aid in the development of brand positioning (See figure 4).

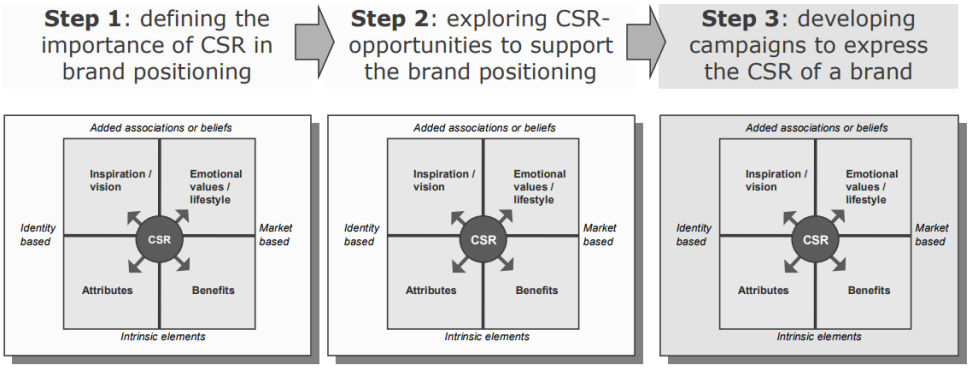

Figure 4. Applying the CSR brand positioning grid (Brüggenwirth, 2006).

Although the model developed by Brüggenwirth (2006) can assist the company in aligning the company's CSR initiatives with intended outcomes when businesses proclaim their engagement in CSR practices, it can quickly draw the attention of activists and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), that will precisely seek to confront their honest involvement in such practices. Besides, a generic model must be appropriately adapted to the business context in which it will be used, in order to take into account important internal and external factors. In fact, a study led by Vallaster et al. (2012) suggests two approaches that will potentially impact the company`s internal and external factors. The author explains that a company respond to different initiators such as market-based which is led by stakeholders

which are concerning with reactive response to CSR, the other approach is value-based which is a management-led thus more proactive engagement. Eventually, these types of approaches can assist the company to better understand how to position their corporate brand in terms of CSR thus overcome potential challenges when using CSR practices as brand strategy.

Besides, the author argues that the company`s positioning towards CSR should be considered, once they will help define the company's strategy and aspirations, which means that, in addition to building a transparent approach to stakeholders, it will enable the company to better understand what approach is dominant in the company and if they should be more reactive or proactive in terms of CSR involvement.

Similarly, Zadek (2004) proposes five phases for developing a corporate culture of responsible business, which are primarily evaluated by the amount of involvement in CSR activities, and which the author describes as defensive, compliance, management, and lastly civil. The author's arguments are intended to allow for a more comprehensive examination of the stages that a company goes through while reacting to and developing a responsible business culture. Having said that, the company needs to identify what strategic approach will be taken in order to better retain consistency and transparency in their brand promise, thus build strong sustainable brand equity.

In summary, although the company can potentially boost brand equity by applying CSR as a brand strategy, the company must take into account challenges that might occur when incorporating CSR practices as a branding strategy. In other words, it is critical that the company embrace CSR practices after assessing its limitations, expectations of its stakeholders and type of approach in terms of involvement with CSR practices. Rather than taking a strategic approach to CSR, without a defined strategy in terms of engagement, transparency and desirable outcomes, which could diminish returns of brand equity and would rise inconsistencies across CSR communications (Vallaster *et al.,* 2012).

Therefore, in order to avoid inconsistencies, another important factor to take into account is related to deep suspicion, which is most commonly associated with companies offering false promises, inaccurate information, and misleading statements. It should be noted that in order to generate a significant result on brand equity, the company should employ an adaptable marketing strategy that can incorporate CSR by taking into account its variables and limitations. For that reason, in the following chapter of this study, we will address how to

align CSR practices with the Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) tool to aid in the development of brand equity.

2.7 Communicating CSR practices through Integrated Marketing Communication tool

As previously mentioned, when communicating CSR practices, it is important to identify approaches, objectives and the marketing strategy by taking into account limitations and moderators that can have a significant influence on the communication. Therefore, this research will assess whether CSR has a significant influence on brand equity and if Integrated Marketing Communication can be aligned to CSR communications in order to effectively communicate to customers.

Empirical studies such as the ones led by Bögel (2019) and Vallaster *et al.* (2012) argues that the advantages of CSR can only be seen by consumers if they are effectively communicated. Apart from the type of approach or activities, a credible and consistent communications management strategy will be required to properly leverage the CSR strategically (Vallaster *et al.*, 2012). In fact, according to Keller (1993) in terms of supporting marketing strategies that develop consumer-based brand equity, a consistent and cohesive brand image is required to increase marketing productivity. Here where comes the integrated marketing communication (IMC) tool which according to Pickton and Broderick (2005) can boost marketing communications by integrating the 4Cs, which are consistency, coherence, continuity and complementary.

According to the authors, the consistency that the tool provides can help to ensure that all of the company's messaging, across all platforms, complement and reinforce one another. Additionally, in terms of coherence, it is assumed that can ensure that the company creates a variety of messages that are all logically linked. Besides, the continuity element in IMC is concerning whether the campaign has a clear connection to prior communications and if it has remained consistent over time. Moreover, the complementary element suggested by the authors aims to guide the company in terms of synergy between the 4Cs, which means ensuring that they are working together in order to intensify the communication effect.

In the same vein, Duncan et al. (1997, p.02 cited by Luxton et al., 2015) add to the subject claims that IMC is "an ongoing, interactive, cross-functional process of brand communication planning, execution, and evaluation that integrates all parties in the exchange process in order to maximize mutual satisfaction of each other's wants and needs". In other words, this approach is mainly guided by stakeholders` behaviors and perception of the brand, but also it

takes into account the conventional and new channels and acknowledges that enhanced brand equity is the result of effective and efficient stakeholder relationships.

Eventually, Ducan (2002) argues that when the company decides to use the IMC tool, it will go through a special decision-making process. The author's model focuses primarily on technology, such as databases and information, while also taking organizational aspects into account. Duncan's model also includes factors for environment analysis, positioning, also elements that can help in assessing the strategy. On the one hand, this model can assist the company use the IMC tool to communicate CSR activities since it focuses on brand message and objectives, which can help boost brand equity. The Duncan model, on the other hand, has deficiencies in terms of multichannel communication and stakeholder insights, which will be critical when communicating CSR activities.

A broader perspective has been adopted by Kliatchko (2005), which has looked at similar aspects of IMC implementations. The author`s model has been used to address the gaps in the previous model such as Ducan`s model. In order to do so, the author focused on the audience, multichannel, and measurements. By doing so, the company will be able to link strategic and tactical marketing communications efforts thus ensure brand message consistency and create media synergy (See figure 5).

Figure 5. Integrated Marketing Communication Duncan (2002) and Kliatchko (2005).

Although the model might provide a basic action when implementing the IMC tool, it also contributes to reducing the level of uncertainty and complexity during the process, by allowing the company to consider critical variables. For instance, it takes into account the

business environment, brand positioning in terms of messaging, as well as strategy and objectives. At the same time, the company must have an available budget to invest consistently across all platforms, besides this approach might need a high level of knowledge in terms of the target audience in order to have a positive outcome.

Batra and Keller (2016) looked at similar aspects of these models and argues that although Integrated Marketing Communication allows a company to communicate in new ways by allowing adaption and greater personalization in the message content, time, and place, it must take consumer behavior and needs into consideration, and if any customers data is inaccurate, the strategy may fail. This could be mainly due to a lack of customer`s awareness and/or expectations of the brand and its activities. This implies that, while the IMC tool can enable the business to maintain consistency throughout the communication process, these traditional models would have to be modified to account for CSR limitations in addition to customers` behaviors and needs.

Besides, according to an empirical study led by Luxton et al. (2015), which focused on determining the extent to which IMC contributes to the development of the brand, assumed that IMC strategy has a considerable impact on campaign effectiveness, as well as a strong indirect impact on brand equity and a potential influence on company financial performance.

It is also assumed by the author that the company's current situation and message delivered are variables that can lead to a positive or negative outcome. This is because integrated CSR communications might increase the company's risk of being perceived as self-serving. In other words, the self-promotional tone, frequency of communication and other aspects suggested by Kim and Ferguson (2018) might be crucial when communicating CSR practices in order to guarantee a positive outcome and long-term value.

In summary, it was noticed that empirical studies evaluate IMC strategy according to what objective is perceived. Therefore, the common purpose of IMC is to provide engagement, increase efficiency within the promotional mix, and maintain brand consistency. Furthermore, no clear link to CSR practices has been established, suggesting that the conventional IMC decision-making process model would need to be adapted to the specific objective to be perceived by taking into account the benefits and challenges. Therefore, in the following chapter, this paper will examine the benefits of implementing IMC as well as how to overcome potential challenges by ensuring that the company`s structures, processes facilitate IMC integration and implementation as a CSR communication tool.

2.8 IMC – Benefits and implementation challenges

2.8.1 Benefits

This chapter will discuss the benefits of implementing IMC as well as how to overcome potential challenges by ensuring that the company`s structures, processes facilitate IMC integration and implementation. According to Laurie and Mortimer (2019), this tool is based on the concept of message consistency and synergy between external stakeholders and the organization, ensuring that all brand communication channels are integrated and the communication is smooth and effective.

Batra and Keller (2016), added to the subject claiming that the IMC tool can help the corporation to better target its audience and deliver relevant messages, resulting in increased media and channel effectiveness. The author also discussed how, by applying the right mix of interactive relations, resources and technology, the IMC tool can create a competitive advantage. This means that, when the IMC tool is used to communicate CSR practices, it can possibly lead to better-performing campaigns, which can lead to improved brand equity outcomes and greater market position. Likewise, according to Beverland and Luxton (2005) when a company wants to target a particular niche, IMC may be useful since it may help them differentiate themselves from bigger dominating competitors, resulting in a favorable competitive effect. Furthermore, as agreed by the authors Laurie and Mortimer, (2019) and Batra and Keller, (2016). It may also increase brand equity by providing authenticity or downplaying market factors, which might assist to revitalize companies in the long run.

Significant analysis and discussion on the subject were presented by Lindgreen *et al.* (2009) claims that a blend of transactional marketing practices, which focuses on attracting customers from a specific segment, and relational marketing, which does not draw clear lines between various marketing techniques because it is not always independent or mutually incompatible, are the key elements when developing CSR practices communications in order to enhance organization performance, once it enables to cover different CSR activities and stakeholder`s group. Although this empirical research provides great insight on the relation of marketing practices and CSR practices, a much more systematic approach would identify how specific marketing tools interacts with other variables, such as stakeholder`s perspectives and expectations on CSR that are believed to be linked to CSR communication outcome. (Vallaster *et al.*, 2012).

Having said that, the company would have to be flexible and meet consumer expectations when communicating CSR practices in order to maximize these benefits, as well as integrate marketing communication with corporate culture and values to avoid brand inconsistency caused by multiple touchpoints and ambiguous positioning (Venger and Pomirleanu, 2018). Eventually, in order to take advantage, the IMC tool, a model that provides a decision-making process framework that considers the strengths and limitations of CSR practices and objectives, is required to ensure that IMC tools are used effectively to communicate CSR practices.

Overall, these studies indicate that the IMC tool which involves different marketing techniques could potentially improve the production of a one-of-a-kind marketing resource combination that competitors will struggle to duplicate because customers will feel more connected to the brand and message if the company delivers a more interactive and targeted campaign. Another essential aspect is that the closer a company gets to its target audience, the more helpful insights and information may be gathered, allowing for faster business responses to customers than traditional marketing campaigns allow.

Besides, the benefits the company will have to face challenges in relation to implementation, in fact, is widely agreed by researchers that there is a lack of knowledge regarding the best way to apply IMC as a CSR communication tool. Therefore, adjustments to the strategy by taking into account the CSR variables and the company organizational structure and culture will be necessary.

2.8.2 Implementation challenges

As previously stated, although the IMC tool might aid in CSR communication, the company might face challenges mainly related to CSR variables, which includes company reputation in terms of CSR as well as customer`s perspectives. (Dewhirst and Davis, 2005). Besides, when implementing the IMC tool, the company organizational structure and culture will have to be aligned in order to ensure effective implementation (Valos *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, this chapter will discuss the main challenges and how to overcome them by aligning the internal and external factors as well as taking into account CSR dimensions communications.

According to Braojos-Gomez et al. (2015), it is a challenge for companies to ensure that when applying the IMC tool, the company have a broad interaction, both internally and externally. In order to build an effective CSR communication through the IMC tool, it will be necessary to adapt the organizational characteristics of the structure, for instance, building an

extensive internal interaction between departments that will involve public relations, marketing, audit committee and any other department that might contribute to building an integrated CSR communication. (Valos *et al.*, 2017). In addition to internal challenges, the author argues that the company would need to have a greater external interaction such as external agencies to manage the different communication platforms.

Similarly, Dewhirst and Davis (2005) discovered that coordinating a range of agencies responsible for different media and ensuring message consistency is one of the most difficult challenges in IMC. Therefore, process and standards or guidelines should be established across all communication aspects in order to guarantee brand consistency as well as contribute to a clearer strategic role of every action within the IMC plan.

It is commonly agreed by Batra and Keller (2016) and Valos *et al.*(2017) that both internal and external challenges must be taken into account when implementing the IMC tool. reinforcing the assumption mentioned in previous chapters that the company's culture and message must be aligned with CSR activities and its communication in order to avoid customer skepticism and brand inconsistency. Therefore, if the company responds to initiators such as a value-based approach, which is a proactive approach towards CSR practices, the company's culture should be aligned with the chosen approach, or else it could generate customer skepticism, which could eventually harm the brand reputation. (Vallaster et al., 2012). Becker-Olsen et al. (2006) added to the discussion by claiming that taking a proactive rather than a reactive approach might help improve consumer beliefs and intentions toward the organization because low initiatives can negatively affect customers ' perceptions.

Aside from the factors listed above, according to Bögel (2019) customers' perspectives on CSR, as well as factors of brand reputation, must be considered while communicating CSR, Apart from that, Luxton et al (2015) pointed out that when a company provides more information however without taking risks into account such as the target audience as well as environmental factors, it could be used for window-dressing or green washing, which is a result of both misleading information and/or poorly executed marketing strategy that might result in significant losses, such as the company's reputation being devalued, a loss of consumer trust, a loss of earnings, and the possibility of the company's failure.

In summary, given the competitive hurdles that most businesses face, the company`s management must consider limitations and threats in every communication strategy that will be implemented. Therefore, IMC might provide greater engagement, integration, and clear

strategy, that can aid to overcome complexity, uncertainties as well as customer skepticism (Valos *et al.*, 2017). Besides, it allows for the convergence of traditional media and other forms of communication. However, the organization may face implementation challenges related to both internal and external relations factors, which, if not well managed, could lead to brand inconsistency and a rise in customer`s skepticism and even window-dressing (Luxton *et al.*, 2015) (Vallaster et al., 2012). Therefore, it is critical that the company's structures, procedures, and culture be aligned when applying IMC as a CSR communication tool, not only to ensure smooth integration and implementation but also to enhance positive outcomes.

2.9 Conceptual Framework

As mentioned in the literature review, despite the widely held assumption that CSR assists company to satisfy their stakeholder expectations, there are still a number of study gaps that are directly linked mainly in relation to the customer's evaluation of the brand, which will depend on the company's past and current reputation, as well as whether the CSR practices are consistent and how well they are communicated. (Bögel, 2019) (Sweeney and Coughlan, 2008) Besides, it is unknown whether CSR practices can influence and/or benefit equally all types of businesses and what are the variables could affect the outcome. Therefore, by reviewing the literature the author assumes that when developing brand equity, it is important to consider the business context thus the company brand reputation (Bögel, 2019). Besides, it is highlighted by Kim and Lee (2018); Venger and Pomirleanu (2018); Srivastava (2019) and Peloza and Papania (2008) that customer`s perspective and expectations are important factors when evaluating the influence of CSR practices and how it might be communicated to customers.

In addition to these factors, a credible and consistent communications management strategy will be required to properly leverage the CSR strategic potential (Vallaster *et al.*, 2012). In fact, according to Keller (1993) in terms of supporting marketing strategies that develop consumer-based brand equity, a consistent and cohesive brand image is required to increase marketing productivity. Here where comes the integrated marketing communication (IMC) tool which according to Pickton and Broderick (2005) can boost marketing communications by integrating the 4Cs, which are consistency, coherence, continuity and complementary.

Although CSR practices might bring benefits to the brand equity it was noticed that the company might face implementation challenges when applying the communication strategy which is mainly related to both internal and external relations factors, which, if not well managed, could lead to brand inconsistency and a rise in customer`s skepticism (Luxton *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, the literature implies that in order to address these challenges, the strategy must be tailored to the company's environment, target audience, and CSR dimensions of CSR communications in order to overcome potential challenges.

As a result, the author developed the conceptual framework shown in Figure 6 above in order to address gaps in previous research and provide more precise results in terms of the influence of CSR on brand equity and how to effectively communicate it to customers.

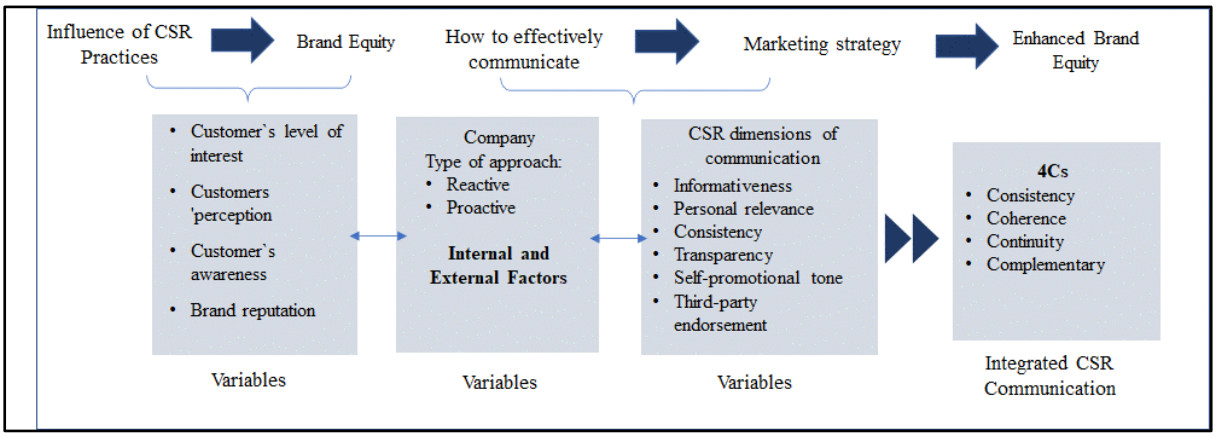

Figure 6. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework takes into account variables such as brand reputation, customer`s perception, level of interest, and awareness which could impact the level of CSR influence brand equity. Besides, the framework will consider the company`s approach concerning CSR as well as the dimensions of CSR communications in order to evaluate whether the company has internal and external factors aligned with its CSR practices and marketing communication. Furthermore, the framework outlines key elements for improving CSR communications, such as dimensions of CSR communications to guarantee that the message is trustworthy and transparent, avoiding customer skepticism as highlighted by the literature reviewed.

The framework also demonstrates a relationship between variables, implying that customer`s perspectives and expectations can be impacted by the company`s CSR positioning as well as how it is communicated, for instance, if it is taking CSR dimensions communications into account in order to guarantee transparency and rapport with the customers.

Following that, the framework suggests Integrated Marketing Communication as a tool to communicate CSR by taking into account CSR communication dimensions in order to ensure that, in addition to having reliable and transparent communication, the company presents an integrated communication across all channels by incorporating the 4Cs throughout the communication process in order to aid in process of improving brand equity.

In short, the framework illustrates the main relationships between the variables, which are factors that might impact the level of influence of CSR on brand equity as well as crucial factors to be taken into account when communicating CSR to customers. Eventually, these concepts and variables will help this study achieve its study objective by assisting in the delivery of more accurate results by taking into account key factors identified in the literature and addressing gaps.

2.10 Conclusion

This chapter explained how the company may create and increase competitive advantage by developing brand equity, and how vital it is to consider brand reputation in doing so. Although the theories and empirical studies discussed in this chapter provide useful insights, there are previous research gaps that are mainly related to the business context that could generate different outcomes. Therefore, in order to assess the actual influence of CSR practices on brand equity, the author developed a conceptual framework that considers variables that could impact on some level the influence of CSR practices.

Besides, in order to develop strong sustainable brand equity, the company must strategically leverage CSR by considering CSR dimensions of communications and applying a marketing strategy tool that can be adapted to the message, the target audience, and the goal to be achieved. As a result, the conceptual frameworks will aid this research in assessing how to effectively communicate CSR practices to customers by taking into account variables related to the company's CSR approach and communication dimensions in order to improve CSR communication while overcoming potential challenges.

3. Methodology

3.1 Overview

The overall methodology and design of the research process that will be utilized to conduct this study will be outlined in this chapter. The author's choice of psychological influences is interpretivism; hence, the following sections will provide a justification for the decision taken

based on the nature of the study. In terms of research method, this study will focus on an exploratory case study at “New Look”, therefore it will be explained how this approach may assist the study in filling gaps and generating more accurate findings. Furthermore, it will be discussed what is the general logic that relates to the chosen interview method of data collection, as well as the benefits and implications. Besides, it will be discussed the many parameters that will be utilized to choose the individuals who will be interviewed as well as the types of questions that will be asked. In summary, this chapter will finish by assessing ethical issues during the data gathering process, as well as a clear explanation on why the qualitative approach is best suited to this study and the techniques that will be used to analyze the raw data obtained.

3.2 Research Paradigm

This section will describe the research paradigm of the study, which is commonly defined as the philosophical influences on the research methodology. The reason for this is that philosophical considerations might interfere with how information is approached as well as how it is used in order to build knowledge while beginning the research. (Saunders et al.,2009).

Saunders et al. (2009) designed the "research onion" framework that shows all of the options approachable to the study. According to this framework, the author can consider four philosophical approaches: positivism, realism, interpretivism, and pragmatism. After analysing the framework, the author concluded that the philosophical approach that will best drive this study is defined as interpretivism.

The aim of interpretive research, according to Saunders et al. (2019). is to develop new, broader understandings and interpretations of social environments and contexts, besides, Bell and Bryman (2007) add to the subject by claiming that the purpose of interpretative research is to learn from each individual occurrence rather than to generalize it. Therefore, the interpretivism approach can provide greater interpretation and flexibility, because the focus of this study will be on the participants' perceptions in order to assess the real influence of CSR practices. As previously mentioned in the literature reviewed, variables that might influence the outcome of these activities, such as customer's perspective, level of interest, and awareness in terms of CSR practices should be taken into account. (Peloza and Papania, 2008; Carroll, 2008; Bögel, 2019). Eventually, it will give a better opportunity for the author to understand the perspectives and feelings and as a result, generate more accurate

and valid data. In order to do so, the author will conduct interviews to gain in-depth insight about individuals and their motives and how they would explain their own behaviors.

However, it is crucial to note the limits of utilizing interpretative philosophy, which as explained by Cohen et al., (2011), could limit the study findings from being generalized, which could have been possible if a more positivist philosophy, that seeks for generalization, was used. Besides, Wagoner (2004) argues that this approach could be influenced by the author`s perspective, once the interpretivism philosophy is subject to interpretation" rather than objective. In order to address this issue, the author will use a qualitative approach to data analysis, constructing standard structures using codes derived from the literature to ensure that the data is covered and reported accurately.

After weighing the options, the author concluded that despite its limitations this approach is the most suitable for better evaluating the influence of CSR practices by taking into account the participant`s emotions, which when added to their comments might provide clearer information about the participant`s perspective on the theme under analysis. While a more positivist approach could provide more objectivity, it could restrict the researcher during the process of analyzing the participants' perspectives.

3.2.1 Research Approach

The inductive approach, according to Saunders et al. (2019), is the most suited when investigating social science topics. The deductive method, on the other hand, would be the approach that would give greater support during the study process in natural science research. After evaluating these options, the author decided on the inductive over deductive approach. First, because this is a typical interpretivism approach to data gathering, which is characterized by a small sample size to better understand the causes of the phenomenon thus identify patterns and relationships to build an assumption (Saunders et al., 2019). Second, the inductive approach can aid in the development of knowledge about themes that have not been thoroughly investigated (Liu, 2016), besides, this approach will aid this dissertation in analyzying the pattern and gain a better knowledge of the relationship between the study's key variables that as indicated in the literature reviewed.

However, as Liu (2016) points out, the inductive approach is intrinsically linked to the author's perspective, and if observations are inaccurate, it might result in gaps in the study findings. In order to mitigate this problem, the author will ensure that all data collected and the literature reviewed are taken into account while creating the codes to interpret the data.

Although the author is aware of the possibility of bias as a result of erroneous observations, this disadvantage exists in every study that uses the inductive approach. After weighing the benefits and limitations of the approach, the author concluded that the approach would have no impact on the data and findings' reliability and validity.

3.3 Research Strategy

As stated before, this dissertation is applying interpretivism philosophy and inductive approach and as explained by Saunders et al (2019) the best method considering the features of such approach is the qualitative instead of quantitative method. According to the author, this is due to the fact that qualitative is defined as a type of method in which the results are not derived through statistical methods, which means it enables the research to evaluate feelings and experiences while also considering the environment in which the event occurs. The qualitative method, on the other hand, assumes that objectivity, in fact, gives the best scientific proof, and it aims for high generalization over high certainty most of the time. In other words, it might overlook feelings and experiences (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2009).

Eventually, when applying the qualitative method, the author will have access to more detailed data which will generate a more detailed analysis. For instance, when evaluating the company's approach to the relationship between CSR practices and brand strategy, as well as the overall approach in terms of CSR communication, it will allow the author to assess data that is unlikely to have been published. Moreover, it will enable to identify the customer` perspectives, level of interest and awareness in terms of CSR practices by interviewing customers in Ireland that have had some level of experience with the company under study.

However, this method also could present some limitations which according to Creswell (2009), is related to overlooking other variables while giving most of the focus on perceptions and feelings. Besides, Saunders et al., (2019) added to the subject by highlighting that this approach focuses on achieving a high level of certainty and low generalization. Which means that the findings of this study might not be fully applicable to different context and event.

Having, all things considered, the author concluded that the benefits of the qualitative method overcome its limitations, once it will aid this study in addressing more properly the research questions. Besides, the author will ensure an iterative approach to data collection and analysis in order to achieve the saturation point. Therefore, the author will analyze the data while it is

being collected, allowing the author to go through cycles of gathering and analyzing until no new information is revealed.

Furthermore, a case study type of research strategy was selected for this dissertation as it will allow the author to gain a deeper knowledge of the business environment by conducting semi-structure interviews with people who work at “New Look” as well as customers in Ireland that recognize the brand to some extent, can provide the author deeper information about the participant`s perspectives.

Moreover, this study will focus on an exploratory case study at "New Look." According to Damico et al. (1999), an exploratory case study is a method of exploring and investigating a subjective topic rather than an explanatory case study, which focuses on describing why particular events happen the way they do. Therefore, the exploratory method will aid in answering the questions of "how" and "what" when exploring the perspectives of a specific group of individuals regarding the research questions. (Wagoner, 2004). The reason for this is that, while consumers' awareness of CSR activities has grown, (He and Lai, 2014) the majority of customers do not research about the company`s CSR or even could potentially not give high importance to the brand based on its CSR practices (Bögel, 2019). Therefore, an exploratory case study will enable the author to connect existing CSR theories, frameworks, and participant perspectives to better understand the variables and constraints.

Although a case study, can provide more certainty hence more accurate results, according to Flyvbjerg (2006), it might be difficult to make generalizations from a single case. Bennett and Elman (2007), on the other hand, claim that a single case study is enough since it will provide undiscovered insights. Besides, this strategy allows for a more specific range of data to be gathered in addition to the increase in flexibility. (Saunders et al., 2019). As a result, although the data will be mainly focused only on a specific business context, it can generate greater details about the topic thus generate valuable insights to the literature of CSR as well as businesses in comparable situations that might want to pursue a similar strategy.

Having, all things considered, this strategy can assist the author in gathering information about the company in order to assess the viewpoints and tactics in place for CSR practices and communication. In short, using a case study can assist in accomplishing the research objectives since the author can gain a comprehensive analysis of the issue in this context and therefore give results that represent the dynamic.

3.3.1 Methods of collecting data

As previously stated, a qualitative research method was chosen for this dissertation. Therefore, the interview method of collecting data is the most prevalent qualitative tool, since an interview approach allows for greater engagement with participants than an anonymous questionnaire, as a consequence, the research will have more in-depth data, which will provide useful insights into the academic field as well as to the company`s management in order to better understand the influence of CSR practices on the brand equity.

The primary data collection process was split into two types of interview methods. The first method is described as asynchronous email interviews. This interview method according to Burns (2010) is ideal to allow the participant more flexibility and comfort, resulting in more in-depth data while also cutting down on the time it takes to get involved in the interview process. However, Fritz and Vandermause (2017) add to the topic highlighting that although participants may participate from any location with an internet connection, which increases response rates, it may restrict the researcher if greater clarity and precision in the responses are required.

Having all things considered, in order to address these issues, the author will provide more questions if needed in order to obtain more detailed and accurate data, ensuring that the data collection reaches the saturation point.

The second type of interview will be online interviews carried via Zoom App alongside asynchronous email interviews with the goal of increasing flexibility, improving the possibilities of follow-up questions, and ensuring that the data has sufficient information to contribute to the process.

3.3.1.1 Company`s participant

The process involves conducting two asynchronous email interviews due to time constraints and the limited availability of participants. Therefore, it will gather information from a Corporate Social Responsibility person who is involved in the daily decision in order to assess the company's approach to the relationship between CSR practices and brand strategy.

3.3.1.2 Customers `participants

In order to assess the extent to which CSR practices influence brand equity, this study will conduct twelve interviews in Ireland by using a mix of asynchronous email and Zoom App interviews, which will allow accessing the consumers' responses to CSR practices and overall perceptions of the brand reputation. Besides, it will aid in understanding the level of interest

and awareness of customers in terms of CSR practices, which will enable the identification of the efficacy of CSR communications.

3.3.1.3 Sample and Size

The qualitative method of data collection will be used in this study, and according to Fugard and Potts (2015) and Braun and Clarke (2016), a minimum sample size of at least twelve interviews should be considered when using the qualitative approach to allow for data saturation. Vasileiou et al. (2018), adds to the subject stating that sample size can change according to the nature and necessity of the research, implying that quality outweighs quantity. Therefore, have considered that this study will conduct fourteen both asynchronous email and Zoom App interviews. The researcher will mainly contact the participants through the LinkedIn page and the researcher`s professional network, in order to obtain certainty rather than a generalization of findings.

Furthermore, non-probability sampling is the most viable approach for this study. According to Saunders et al. (2019), non-probability sampling allows the author to choose the participants subjectively. Therefore, it enables the author to address the research objectives by assessing relevant information and avoiding limitations by guaranteeing that the pool of participants is diverse in terms of education, age, gender, and other factors.

3.3.1.4 Time Horizon

Due to time constraints, the most viable time horizon for this study will be cross-sectional, which implies that data would be collected over a period of weeks. However, as Saunders et al. (2019) point out, this approach may restrict the research's evaluation because it only analyzes one-time perspectives and so ignores ongoing changes in the surrounding environment. The author has acknowledged the benefits and drawbacks that this method may bring and has concluded that it will have no impact on the quality of data collected because even if the context setting understudy can change in the future, the author assumes the tools and frameworks of this study can be applied to aid in future research development.

3.4 Nature of data

The nature of the data obtained for this investigation will be explained in this section. There will be fourteen interviews each lasting up to 30 minutes, with semi-structured questions that will largely be open-ended that can serve as a flexible guide rather than a strict structure, allowing for better discussion and extra information for assessment and it will take up to 30 minutes.

3.4.1 Company`s participant

This interview stage will deal with determining the company's present self-perception in terms of CSR activities and branding strategy, as well as the major obstacles in communicating it to customers. Therefore, the interviews were structured and designed in order to align back to the study`s research objectives by including variables and themes from the literature reviewed which were incorporated seamlessly in the conceptual framework. The questions such illustrated below will be asked:

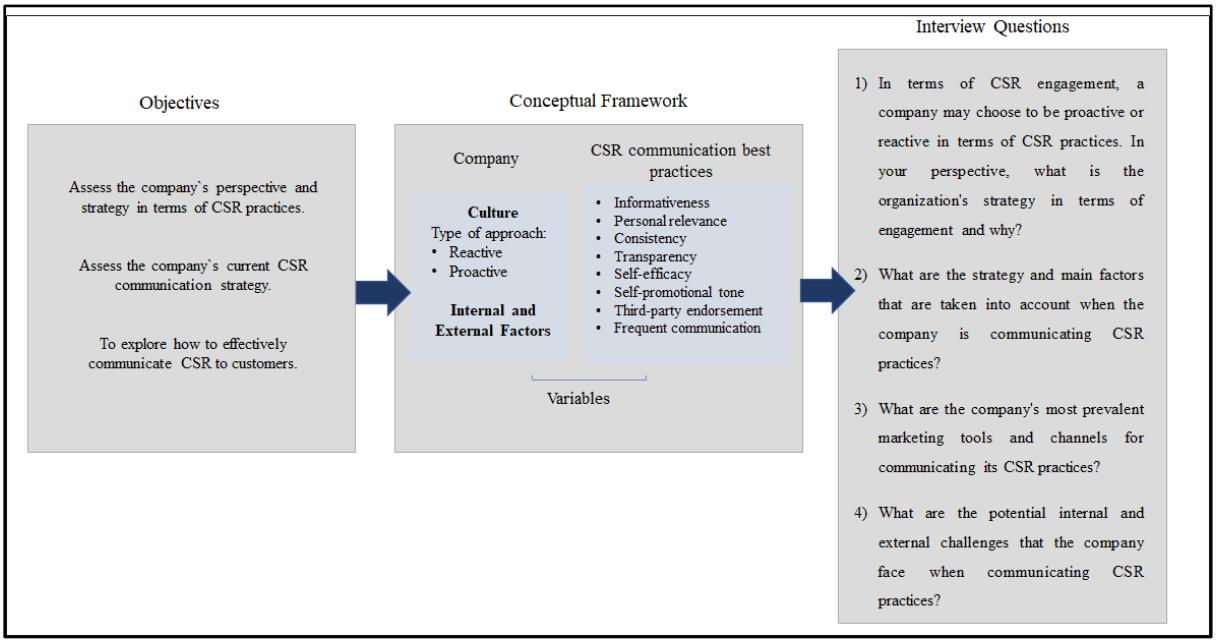

Figure 7. Sample Interview Questions 1 - Developed by Author

3.4.2 Customers` participants

The aim of the questions is to obtain participants' viewpoints on CSR activities in order to better assess the influence that CSR practices might have on brand equity. It will also aim to collect data on customer responses to the current “New Look” CSR communications in order to get insights into how to enhance CSR communications by taking customer response into consideration. In order to do so, questions like the ones below will be linked with the conceptual framework developed in accordance with the main variables identified in the literature reviewed.

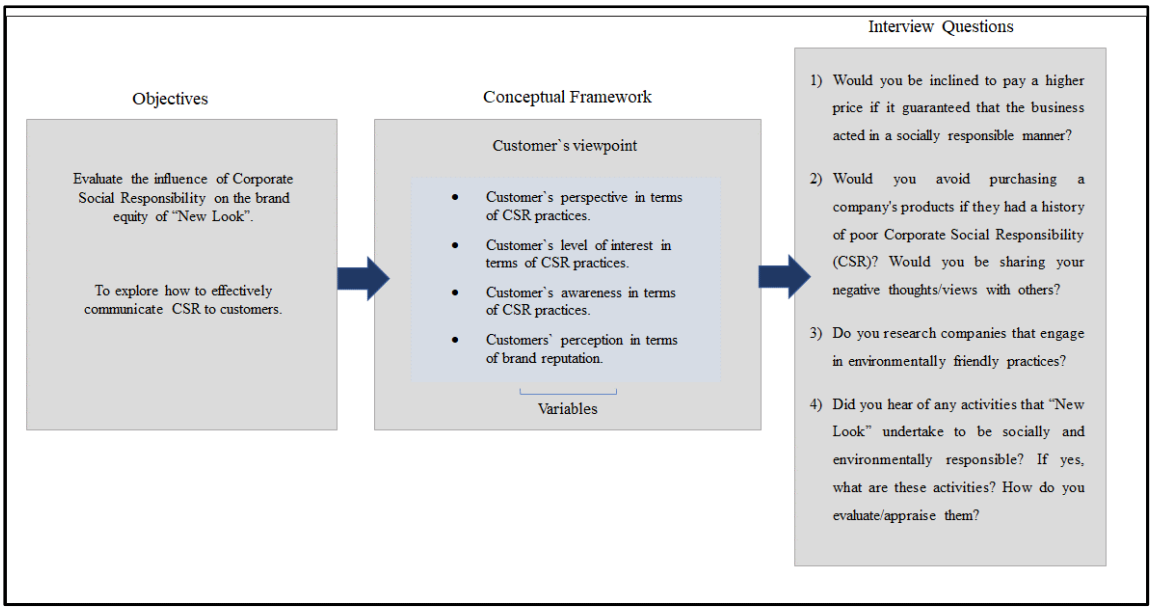

Figure 8. Sample Interview Questions 2 - Developed by Author

3.5 Ethics issues to collecting data

When obtaining qualitative data for this study, the author ensured that the data's validity, reliability, and credibility were preserved by giving transparency on the techniques used and accuracy in relation to the findings, as well as producing consistency within the used analytical procedures. The main points addressed by the author is illustrated below:

- Maintaining detailed records, displaying a clear decision path, and guaranteeing that data interpretations are transparent.
- To guarantee that diverse views are represented, establish a priori codes for comparison and find out similarities and contrasts among data.
- Ensure that participants' perspectives and any evidence that could contradict the findings are evaluated.

Furthermore, all participants were informed of their rights, as they were required to consent before starting with the interview by agreeing to the "Plain Language Statement" and the "Consent Form," which provided information about the author, the purpose of the study also the expected time for finishing the interview. Besides, it was stated that the findings of the interview would be used exclusively for this dissertation, that all research participants' names would be kept confidential, that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time, and that the interviews and transcriptions would be deleted after the dissertation was approved.

3.6 Techniques for analyzing data

This section outlines the analytic qualitative analysis process that will be used in this dissertation. The author has chosen template analysis (TA) as the technique for analyzing the data. The template analysis is a technique that guides the researcher to thematically analyse the qualitative data. According to Brooks et al. (2015), it can allow the researcher to identify what subject/code has not been mentioned in the data gathered, besides, this technique aid in developing codes based on the literature and refine them later, if necessary, in order to achieve the research objectives (King, 2012). The template analysis process will involve the steps as represented in figure 9 below.

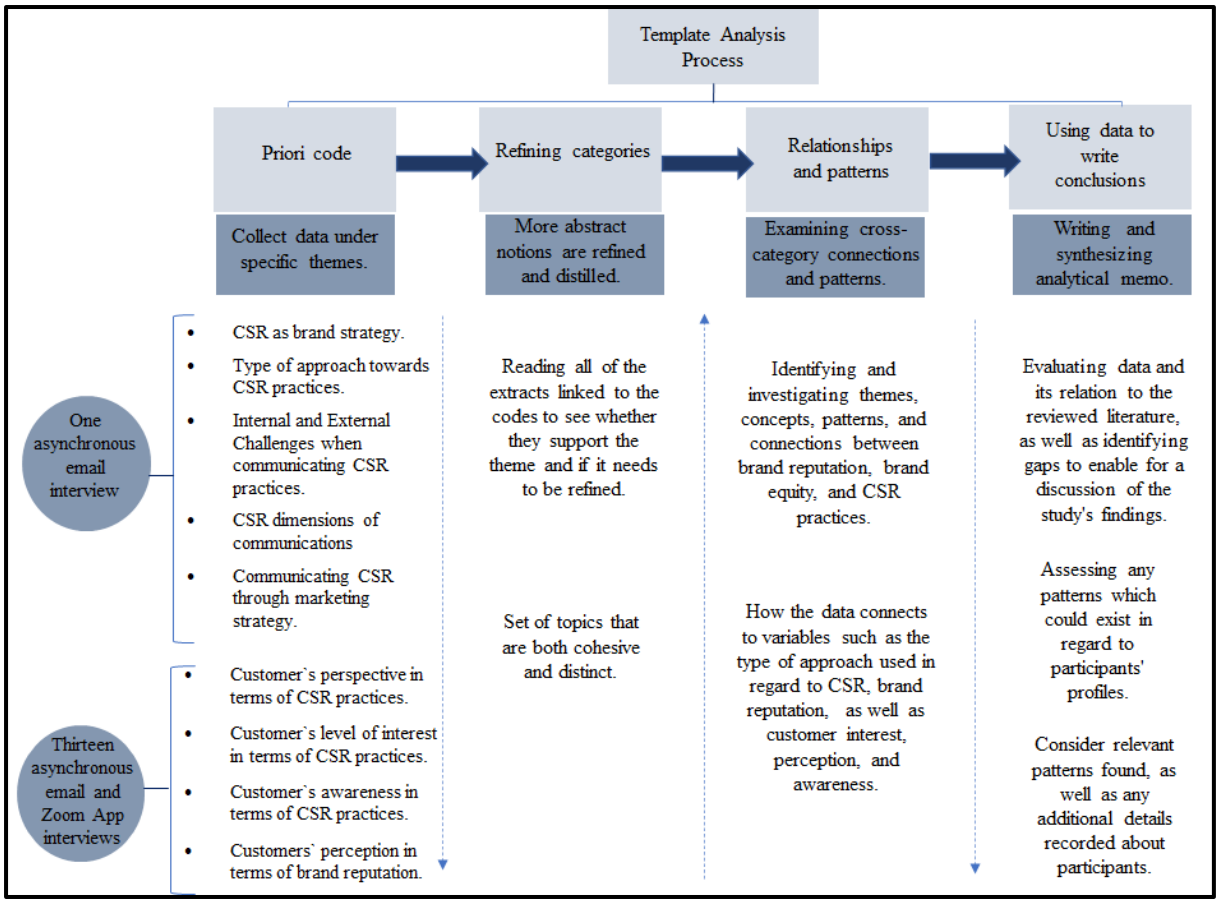

Figure 9. Template Analysis

1. Priori code: In order to start the analysis, topics identified in the literature are organized as a collection of codes or categories before starting the data collection.
2. Refining categories: When examining the data, the categories will be refined, if necessary, by adding subcategories that appear to be relevant to the research question.

3. Relationships and patterns: This stage will include organizing the emergent themes into predetermined categories and defining how they interact within and across these categories.
4. Using data to write conclusions: In order to report findings, this step will include condensing codes, themes, and their relationships into a more abstract form while taking into consideration literature and the conceptual framework.

In summary, categorizing data by themes and revising them in case new data is highlighted from data provides the researcher flexibility and improves the research's validity, reliability, and credibility. Although this technique benefits this dissertation because it is clear, systematic, and easy to adapt to the research question and objectives, it is important to note that if the initial coding is not done properly by taking into account relevant themes from the literature, empirical findings may be limited. The author is aware of the risk and has ensured that the themes are precise in order to meet the research objective.

3.7 Conclusion

This study will assess the influence of corporate social responsibility (CSR) on the overall brand equity of New Look, as well as how to effectively communicate it to customers. Therefore, by basing on the theories, framework, and data findings, this study may be able to more accurately identify the influence of CSR practices on the brand equity of the company under study. Eventually, the company can improve or readapt its CSR practices and communications strategies, as it would be a potential source of intangible competitive advantage. In short, the value that this study generates might assist the company in gaining a better understanding of current and emerging customer behaviors in terms of CSR activities, as well as what is one of the marketing strategies approaches that could aid in the delivery of CSR communication. However, it is important to note that this study may not be able to achieve a high level of generalization in its findings, which means that, while the findings of this study may provide useful insights to similar types of businesses, the findings and suggestions are primarily focused on the company under study in the Republic of Ireland.

4. Presentation and discussion of the findings

4.1 Overview

This chapter will present the study's data collection and analysis. Therefore, it will also describe how the Template Analysis was carried out and how it was utilized to interpret the data. The template analysis will be used to verify the four objectives listed below:

1. Evaluate the influence of Corporate Social Responsibility on "New Look" brand equity.
2. Assess the company`s perspective and strategy in terms of CSR practices.
3. Assess the company`s current CSR communication strategy.
4. To explore how to effectively communicate CSR to customers.

The author was able to represent different perspectives and insights on CSR practices and communications by using Template Analysis to aid in the categorization of main themes and relationships between the participants' answers. For instance, it was highlighted price and quality as well as evidence as key determinants to some responses towards CSR practices, which were then analysed and explained based on its outputs and literature.

In a summary, this chapter details the findings utilized to evaluate the influence of CSR on "New Look" brand equity, as well as how to effectively communicate to customers. Overall, thirteen interviews were done in Ireland, seven via the Zoom App and six via the asynchronous email method. Moreover, each section contains a detailed discussion of each research objective findings, as well as what the author was attempting to assess and explore in regard to the research objective.

4.2 Data gathering

Over the course of fifteen days, from July 28th to August 11th, fourteen semi-structured interviews, each lasting approximately 30 minutes, were conducted. For this study, non-probability sampling was utilized to choose the research participants; as a result, the participants were chosen subjectively included a Corporate Social Responsibility participant who works at "New Look" as well as thirteen customers in Ireland that follow the "New Look" brand on the LinkedIn page thus recognize the brand to some extent. This enabled the author to address the research objectives by assessing relevant information and avoiding limitations by guaranteeing that the pool of participants was diverse in terms of age, gender,

and other factors. The table below provides an overview of the demographic data of the thirteen customers who took part in the interview

Gender	Qtde
Female	8
Male	5
Degree or level of school	
High School degree	2
Bachalor`s degree	6
Postgraduate degree	1
Master`s degree	4
Age	
18 – 25 years old	1
26 – 35 years old	7
36 – 45 years old	3
46 –55 years old	2
Currently living in Ireland	
Participants	13

Table 1. Customer`s demographics

Table 1 shows that the bulk of the participants are between the ages of 26 and 35, with females being the most prevalent gender. Furthermore, the vast majority of those who responded held a bachelor's degree. Participants would be more familiar with the subject, which could lead to more detailed data. However, not adding more high school graduates to the study may limit the scope of the analysis.

In addition, the second table below provides an overview of the individual who participated in the interview, as well as the degree of responsibility and length of time in the role.

Name	Role	Working in the company	Working in this role in the company	Working in this field
Participant 1	Corporate Social Responsibility Manager	4 years	2 years	7 years

Table 2. Company`s participant data

Despite the fact that the company's participant has only been in the post for two years, the participant has been dealing with CSR for more than seven years, allowing the author to examine more in-depth data.

4.3 Findings

There were four phases to the data analysis. The first phase was to create codes, which are priori codes that were connected to the literature reviewed and linked to the research objectives. Therefore, elements that might influence CSR activities and brand equity were considered. Following that, the codes were refined, and every additional determining element that may alter the customer's response to the amount of influence of CSR practices was included. The following table presents the overall descriptions of the codes.

Objective	Codes
Evaluate the influence of Corporate Social Responsibility on brand equity of "New Look".	Customer`s perspective in terms of CSR practices.
	Customer`s level of interest in terms of CSR practices.
	Customer`s awareness in terms of CSR practices.
	Customers` perception in terms of brand reputation.
Assess the company`s perspective and strategy in terms of CSR practices.	Type of approach and strategy towards CSR practices.
Assess the company`s current CSR communication strategy.	Communication strateg: Benefits, challenges and marketing strategy
How to effectively communicate CSR to customers.	Key communication factors and marketing strategy

Table 3. Coding system for data classification

4.3.1 First objective

Evaluate the influence of Corporate Social Responsibility on the brand equity of "New Look".

Customer`s perspective

The first objective of this dissertation was to determine the level to which CSR practices can influence "New Look" brand equity. The first question aimed to determine each participant's degree of knowledge in terms of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), as well as their perspective and relevance to the subject. According to the findings, four participants have a high level of influence on their brand selection when considering CSR practices, six have a moderate level, and three have a low level.

Participants 10 and 12 were the only ones who answered that were aware of CSR and did not deposit great relevance or interest in the topic.

"Not concerned with this. I am aware of CSR and view it as marketing." Participant 10

"I think there are other things I would consider more important." Participant 12

Some participants provided different responses, indicating a moderate level of influence on their brand selection.

"Well, probably a little although I wouldn`t I wouldn't at this stage you see if I knew that so let's say I did come to the shop, and they would explain me that they do certain things in certain way it probably had the same degree of influence than the other shop. But I would say this will be around maybe between 10 to 25% influence on my decision." Participant 1

"It is something I've never thought about in my life. But I maybe I would…I think I would because it's important to make changes this kind of way." Participant 4

"If somehow, I knew that such a company did something inappropriate, then I would reconsider buying from them. However, as I don't hold such data in my head, I buy from any shop that I want/need." Participant 7

Participants who were identified as having a high level of influence made comments such as the ones shown below.

"I would support that company over others and would advertise by speaking to others about their CSR approach" Participant 11

"For me it's important to not buy in in companies that don't care about those issues you know" Participant 4

These responses reinforce the literature reviewed that highlighted variables such as customer`s perspective might impact the level of influence of CSR practices on brand equity. c Besides, although has increased the awareness of CSR practices by the consumers, (He and Lai, 2014) the majority of customers do not research about the company`s CSR or even could potentially not give high importance to the brand based on its CSR practices, which can diminish the influence on brand equity significantly.

One unanticipated finding was that some of the participants were more interested in the company's CSR practices if they were linked to specific CSR efforts i.e., environmental practices, social practices, as shown below.

"No I'm more inclined decisions that will influence me from corporate social responsibility will be more what they do for people locally or something like that, not the product exact was what materials they use." Participant 1

According to Post et al (2002 p.10 cited by Peloza and Papania, 2008) the stakeholder's perception of CSR activities tends to shift over time due to change of priorities across different stakeholder groups, also due to new issues of relevance. Indeed, one of the participants stated that the environment has not been a major concern in the past, but now he is beginning to pay more attention to it.

"*Well, yes. I would I mean environment is something that I must admit I've only really started to feel seriously but that takes seriously as an individual probably within the past two years three years of my life and because it is becoming an emergency issue so these people so yeah I guess I would now"* Participant 3

Customer`s level of interest

The next question aimed to assess the customer`s level of interest by identifying if the customers were willing to pay more if is guaranteed that the company is involved in CSR practices. The findings showed that two participants presented a moderate level of influence, three high level and nine low levels, which means the majority of the participants would not be willing to pay a higher price solely concerning CSR practices. As a result, the participants emphasized two determinants. As determinants, the participants emphasized price and quality. As demonstrated below they stated that would pay a higher price if the company was engaged in CSR practices, but it would depend on how much more costly and also the quality of the product itself.

"Well, I have to say that from my experience yes, but depends on the range or how much more expensive." Participant 1

"I would buy. I would decide to buy from them. But also I would try to find the balancing price as well like if it was a little bit more expensive for that, yes." Participant 5

"I think I would. However, it would depend on the product quality and the price. I would be willing to pay a significantly higher price for a product if I was sure that the product would last longer." Participant 7

It is surprising that empirical research has not directly shown this specific factor in terms of customer willingness to pay a higher price as a determinant of CSR` level of influence.

However, the data clearly demonstrate that, from the customer point of view, paying a higher price will depend on how much more expensive the product is and the quality of the product itself, and not only on CSR activities.

Customer`s awareness

The next question was concerned with the level of customer`s awareness of "New Look" CSR practices. The author aimed to gain a better understanding of how well customers were aware of "New Look" CSR activities and whether its communication strategy influenced customer brand selection. The majority of participants, represented by eleven people, stated that they had no knowledge "New Look" was actively involved in CSR practices and had never heard of their campaigns. The replies related to this topic are presented below.

"I didn't go through their social media but if the website doesn't communicate that I felt that they can do really better because at this moment I think they're just doing that because of social pressure because that it's trendy now in order to keep the revenues we need to have those statements numbers" Participant 1

"In my search for the company, there is nothing about CSR. This should be the first thing that is evident when you click on their site. It could be there but it's not to the fore." Participant 11

"No I haven`t. but if they do something about it I would like to hear about it" Participants 4

In response to this topic, most of those interviewed indicated a low level of awareness, which was mostly due to a lack of a deep relationship with the brand and/or a lack of clarity and evidence regarding the practices being communicated. This implies that the company's current CSR communication might not be able to deliver an effective message by incorporating the main CSR communication dimensions, such as informativeness, endorsement, personal relevance, consistency, message tone, and transparency, as outlined by Kim and Ferguson (2018).

Brand Reputation

In the final part of the interview, participants were asked about their perception in terms of brand reputation. The author sought to determine how customers felt about negative brand reputation in terms of CSR practices, and if it influenced their brand preference. According to the findings, two participants had a low level of influence over brand reputation, four had a low level of influence, and seven had a moderate level of influence.

Participants with a high level of influence stated that once they had lost trust in the company, they were unlikely to trust again.

"*If I hear anything bad about a company I won't support them, even if they improve over time. They would have to prove that they are on the right track again but unfortunately, sub-consciously, the damage is done."* Participant 11

Other responses to this topic included a low level of influence which means the company`s bad reputation would not necessarily impact their brand selection.

One interviewee said*: "Yeah I guess this an answer that I have to be kind of painfully honest like. I would like to think I would, but then sometimes it's like I like many people in Dublin city, I buy my clothes at Penney's you know because we all live on a budget, and we all hear the stories about Penneys using slave labor in Asia and of course, I despise that yet there's a big chance I'm going into Penneys next week to buy some clothes."* Participant 3

Another interviewee said: *"I wouldn't avoid the buying the products but still I will be interested in why they haven't done anything and what are they doing to regarding that situation."* Participant 9

The majority of the participants indicated that their response toward the company would be moderate. However, it was also stated that they would need evidence that the company has changed.

One participant stated that: *"Well first of all I think everybody deserves a second chance so if I saw that those efforts were really working and they were really committed to that, maybe I would give them another chance. But I would look at that more carefully to create my opinion about the brand."* Participant 5

Another participant commented: *"Absolutely and I would require hard proof that it had changed."* Participant 12

In sum, brand reputation was found to have a moderate level of influence. However, another noteworthy finding from the data is that, while customers would be ready to give the company another chance, the replies showed that the company would need to demonstrate evidence that it has changed. These responses might be explained by Barnett (2007), which claims stakeholder evaluations of a company can be influenced by past experiences as well as the company's reputation underneath an initiative, which can lead to a predisposed view of

the company's activities as positive or negative. As a result, previous experience with CSR initiatives influences the level to which stakeholders recognize and respond to new initiatives.

Challenge - Skepticism

Furthermore, a common finding in the interviews was that participants would be skeptical when they saw CSR activities, in the sense that they would question if it was real or whether it was merely a marketing tactic. The comment below illustrates their response in relation to that.

“I guess I go that is the company that says is responsible that's what I think, as opposed to that's a responsible company, I go ahh that is the company who says they're responsible.” Participant 3

“I feel the social responsibility is subjective and I would not trust that it would be genuine.” Participant 12

“Sometimes I see that they usually use this as a just a slogan but it's not actually 100% truth so it's hard to really know if the company is really committed and engaged.”

Participant 5

This finding is confirmed by the literature reviewed, which was highlighted by the work undertaken by Barnett (2007) and Syed Alwi et al. (2017) who claims that skepticism might be one of the common limitation’s gaps of clarity on whether CSR communication factors can improve the CSR strategy in order to generate positive outcomes towards brand equity. It is commonly agreed by the authors that the company`s reputation can generate customers` skepticism.

The majority of participants indicated that "New Look's" supply chain operations were not properly transparent and demonstrated a lack of evidence in terms of their activities. In fact, one participant commented: *"Where their CEOs, the management going to those places where the movies from those places what is the activity that I can even relate from those on the website"* Participant 1

Once "New Look" has proven itself as a fast-fashion brand, aligning the company's culture with its CSR practices might aid the company to overcome this challenge. One alternative is to incorporate CSR dimensions of communications, as previously indicated, as well as

informing, reporting, and involving stakeholders by progressive iterations in order to improve efforts and create legitimacy. (Morsing and Schultz, 2006).

In summary, based on the responses provided by the participants, it reaffirms the literature presented by demonstrating influence on brand equity, however, variables relating to CSR practices, such as customers 'perspective, level of interest, awareness, as well as brand reputation and skepticism, might present different level of influence. Besides, some key determinants were identified during the interviews such as evidence of the CSR practices as well as price and quality of the products which might result in a different outcome in terms of influence level. The table below will show in detail the correlation of variables among the participants and the results identified when taken into account the determinants highlighted during the interviews.

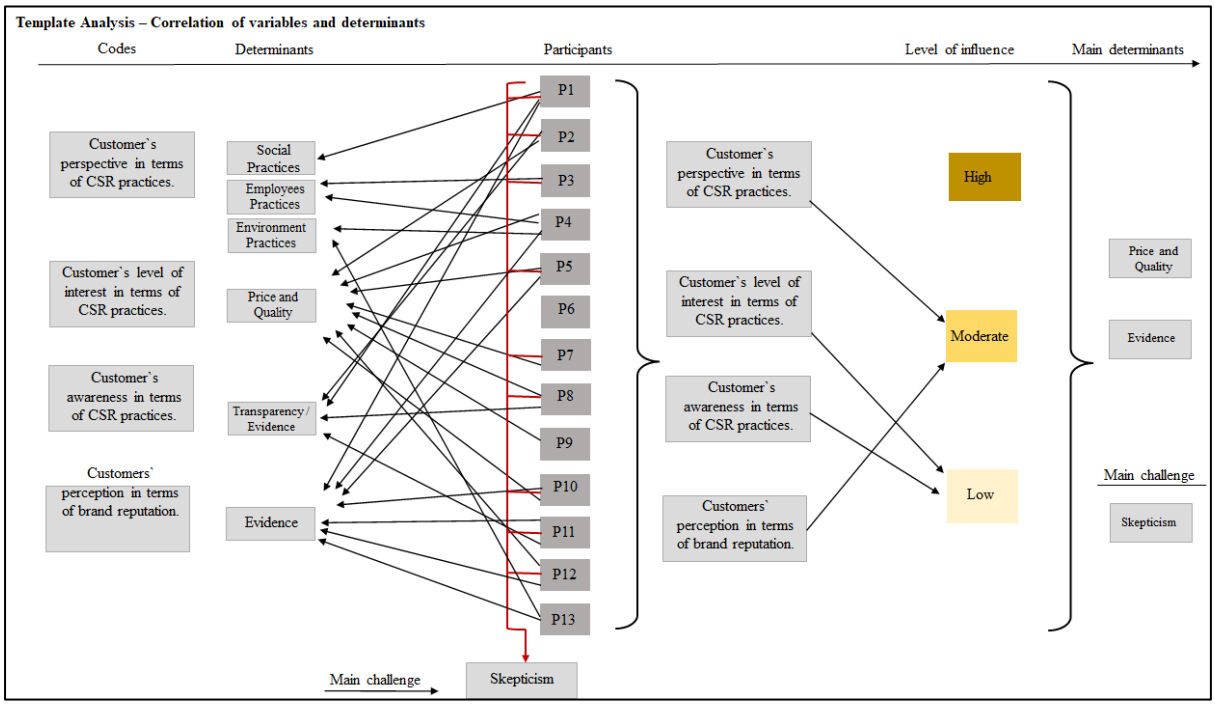

Table 4. Template Analysis – Correlation of variables and determinants.

Table 4 shows the results of the analysis, as well as the intercorrelations between the four variables and the data's key determinants. Based on the data, the influence of CSR on brand equity is reinforced by a connection between factors and determinants. However, the level of influence of the customer's perspective and brand reputation was found to be moderate, followed by the low level of interest and awareness. This indicates a lack of consistency in the results. As a result, the extent to which any of these factors can influence brand equity has been found to be inconclusive.

4.3.2 Second Objective

Assess the company`s perspective and strategy in terms of CSR practices.

To assess the company`s approach and communication strategy it is necessary to understand what is the strategy that the company is employing towards CSR efforts as well as how it is being currently communicated to customers. In order to do so, the first set of questions intended to gain a deeper understanding of the company's engagement strategy as well as its broader brand management plan. The comment below illustrates the participant`s response.

"The company strategy is a mix of proactive and reactive. Because, the company apply all necessaries approaches to fulfill all compliance requirements, and when it is feasible, the company undertake broader projects that would not have a big interference in our products cost and yet would positively contribute to the society, environment and etc." Company`s Participant

Despite the fact that the participant claimed that the company uses a combination of proactive and reactive approaches. According to Vallaster et al., (2012) the company respond to different initiators such as market-based which is led by stakeholders which is a reactive response concerning CSR, and value-based which is management-led thus more proactive engagement.

It is assumed that that "New Look" has a reactive approach towards its CSR practices, this is because the data indicates that the firm does not proactively engage in CSR activities, but rather undertakes initiatives when needed, as seen below.

"When it is feasible, the company undertake broader projects". Company`s participant.

The author also questioned the participant about the company's current CSR strategy, if it is related to brand strategy in any manner, and what are the main factors considered. No significant correlation was found in the company strategy between CSR practices and brand strategy. In fact, the participant suggested that CSR strategy outcomes would be a result of their overall approach. For example, the interviewee said:

"We haven't linked CSR directly to those factors, however, we believe it is consequence of all actions." Company`s participant

*"The company`s CSR approach is embedded with some aspects of brand strategy, such as the brand image. However, it isn't drawn a clear relation to brand strategy."* Company`s participant

As mentioned in the literature review, according to Vallaster et al., (2012) from a brand strategy standpoint, a CSR approach should be based on aspects of the brand equity thus themes that interacts with all key stakeholder groups. This view is supported by Jones (2005), who argues that brand equity is linked to NGOs, the media, and customers, implying that these stakeholders' expectations will influence brand equity outcomes. Although the participant stated that they consider certain aspects of brand equity, such as brand image, the approach may be improved when executing the company's brand strategy and creating a more direct link to all other aspects of brand equity and CSR.

The following subject question presented was about the participant's opinion on whether the company's CSR efforts had benefitted or harmed the company's overall brand equity. The participant gave the following comments.

"I believe that our CSR efforts have helped the company in a variety of ways. As an example. The corporation follows all compliance standards and works with business associations, non-governmental organizations, and labor unions on important initiatives based on social compliance. This helps to maintain a positive corporate image not just with our suppliers, but also with other stakeholders such as customers." Company`s Participant

"As a result, the company's reputation has grown positively and will continue to do so. Although we recognize that we're not there yet. But we're on our way." Company`s Participant

This finding implies that CSR activities have benefited the company's overall brand equity; however, the participant chose to not comment on the potential harm that the CSR strategy may have caused to the brand. "*Regarding the remaining questions, I would rather not comment on them."* This response could be due to a lack of assessment of CSR outcomes, or it could be due to a concern of unfavorable information being disclosed.

The author sought to analyze the company's perspective and strategy in terms of CSR activities, and the findings indicate that the company takes a reactive approach concerning the engagement with CSR practices It is also has been found that the company does not link CSR and brand strategy directly, which might indicate an opportunity for future developments to better integrate stakeholders' expectations. This finding reinforces the previously mentioned lack of customer awareness, which could be justified by the lack of a direct link between strategy and CSR practices.

In short, while the CSR approach was stated to have improved the company's brand equity, one key finding that was not very clear is an evident discrepancy between the company`s participant and the customers perspective, since the customers demonstrated low awareness towards the company communication as well as lack of evidence and transparency, which indicates that the company might not be effective in terms of their CSR communication. Besides, the company`s participant provided incomplete or unclear responses. As a result, the data analysis was restricted. In this case, it was hard to ascertain whether the company is effectively communicating CSR practices to customers.

4.3.3 Third Objective

Assess the company`s current CSR communication strategy.

The third objective of this research was to determine what are the company`s strategy and main factors that are taken into account when the company is communicating CSR practices. The participant expressed that one of the main factors are clarity, coherence and accessibility.

"We examine if the message is clear and coherent. Furthermore, we analyze what the campaign or statement is and where it would be more pleasing and simpler for our stakeholders to locate." Company`s Participant

"The most realistic and logical approach would be to ensure that our stakeholders understand the message while keeping the message basic but significant in meaning." Company`s Participant

According to the participant`s response, it is assumed that the company consider some factors such as message and clarity when communicating CSR. However, according to the literature reviewed further factors should be taken into account in order to ensure effective communication. In fact, according to Dawkins (2004), elements such as transparency, message tone, and consistency, are some of the ways to produce effective communications on corporate social responsibility matters. This view is supported by Kim and Ferguson (2018) that talks about the main dimensions of CSR communications that might avoid customer`s skepticism.

Furthermore, the author wanted to know what the business's most common marketing tools and channels are for promoting its CSR initiatives, as well as whether there are any possible internal and external obstacles that the company has when employing CSR practices. The comments below illustrate the participant`s response to this subject.

"I don't have a lot of knowledge regarding marketing tools. However, I am aware that our approach includes communicating via our website, social media, and so on." Company`s Participant

*"I`m am not directly associated with the communication strategy. However, I don't believe we confront many challenges. When we talk about our CSR initiatives, we believe that our customers feel more connected to the company."* Company`s Participant

After an analysis of the findings, the research found that the aforementioned responses are imprecise in terms of what marketing tools are used to communicate CSR practices, as well as the key potential challenges when promoting them. Besides, while, the company considers factors such as clarity and accessibility. According to the comments of the customers, the company's communication especially on their website lacked information and evidence. As a result, it suggests that the company may not be including key elements such as informativeness, transparency, and consistency into its CSR communication in order to not only avoid skepticism but also to enhance CSR outcomes.

4.3.4 Fourth Objective

To explore how to effectively communicate CSR to customers

In order to assess how to effectively communicate CSR to customers, the author aimed to analyze customers' perspectives on "New Look" CSR communication as well as the company's perspective on a reasonable and feasible way of communicating CSR practices.

In terms of customers, the comments below reflect the customer viewpoint on the "New Look" campaign called "New Look Kind," as well as current overall CSR communication. As shown below, there were four comments that expressed skepticism about whether the company had put in enough effort and if the information disclosed was accurate.

"if the companies are especially now in the Far East countries and that is where the questionable things happen about corporate social responsibility and that's why I believe New Look for example didn't put enough effort to communicate that they really care I think it's for a company in such a level the resources the materials and I think a student in the first year actually could do a little bit better in sending the information and if this company who says they do those things or invest so how much €5? because I don't see more effort than this." Participant 1

"Yes, that slogan if effective. I would like to know what they mean about '...won't cost the earth' as the fashion industry is so wasteful and uses up so much water and material and is

disgarded and goes to form clothes mountains in poor countries. I would love to see a large brand tackle this. My motivation would be to see if it is true (how can it be true??).” Participant 11

“The slogan is appealing, although to really claim it textiles would need to be e.g. 100% recyclables, and is that the case? If not, the campaign statement is misleading.” Participant 8

Whilst five participants had a favorable response to the campaign and overall communication despite their skepticism, as seen below.

“I would be interested to know more about it, I would like to know how they do with the waste that the company produce.” Participant 9

“Yeah. I would like to. I would like to know more about their campaign on how there they worked because as I said I like the brand, I like sometimes I see the clothing that’s nice that's nice so if I know how they are manufacturing their products. I would buy them yeah.” Participant 4

I think more about how they are doing. It really catches me part that “ won`t cost the earth” I think I would like to know more about it and how they are doing this. How this work” Participant 2

A recurring theme in the interviews was a sense among interviewees that if the campaign and/or their communications regarding CSR were accurate, they would require more evidence and transparency in terms of the activities. As mentioned in the literature reviewed the components of CSR dimensions of communication, such as transparency, informativeness can aid in reducing customer`s skepticism but also creating communication consistency and building credibility on long-term. (Kim and Ferguson, 2018). Besides, three participants stated that the company's campaign and/or communications had no effect on them since they were disinterested in the subject and would be more concerned with the price and quality of the product, as seen below.

“No. I would be interested in the quality, utility and price of the product.” Participant 10

“No, I don't want to learn more about the campaign. To get me interested in this company, I would need to hear from people that surround me that they bought something from there that was at a good price and the quality impressed them.” Participant 7

“No, Unless it tapped into a need I had” Participant 12

These responses also reinforce the previous assumption in relation to customer`s level of interest and its influence on CSR outcomes. Eventually, in addition to incorporating CSR communications dimensions into the company's strategy, it is critical to take into account variables such as customer`s level of interest, awareness and so on in order to understand customer needs and expectations thus communicate effectively CSR practices by improving transparency, and credibility into the company's CSR communications. (Dawkins, 2004) (Morsing and Schultz, 2006).

In addition, the author asked the company's participant as to what approach of communicating CSR practices would be the most feasible and reasonable in their opinion. The comments below represent the company`s participant`s view.

"The most realistic and logical approach would be to ensure that our stakeholders understand the message while keeping the message basic but significant in meaning."

"… projects that would not have a big interference in the cost of our products and yet would positively contribute to the society, environment, etc."

"We examine if the message is clear and coherent. Furthermore, we analyze what the campaign or statement is and where it would be more pleasing and simpler for our stakeholders to locate."

This finding implies that the organization communicates with a focus on connection and coherence. Customers, on the other hand, would be more likely to be impacted if key factors such as evidence and transparency were implemented, as previously indicated.

Another important point is that the comments above did not indicate a direct relationship to Integrated Marketing Communication and according to Vallaster et al. (2012) a credible and consistent communications management strategy will be required to properly leverage the CSR strategically. In fact, Keller (1993) adds to the subject stating that in terms of supporting marketing strategies that develop consumer-based brand equity, a consistent and cohesive brand image is required to increase marketing productivity. Here where comes the integrated marketing communication (IMC) tool which according to Pickton and Broderick (2005) can boost marketing communications by integrating the 4Cs, which are consistency, coherence, continuity and complementary.

In short, it can therefore be assumed that Integrated Marketing Communication could be one of the tools available to help the company enhance its communication even more. However, both internal and external factors must be taken into account when implementing the IMC

tool to communicate CSR practices. According to Batra and Keller (2016) factors related to the company`s culture should be taken into account and as mentioned in the literature reviewed. The company`s culture and message must be aligned with CSR practices and its communication in order to avoid both customer skepticism and brand inconsistency. In order to do so, the company might apply the approach described by Morsing and Schultz (2006) which aims to not only inform, report but also involve the stakeholders by maintaining progressive iterations in order to enhance the efforts and create legitimacy.

4.4 Conclusion

The findings of the primary data produced from semi-structured interviews were presented and discussed in this chapter. The findings were interpreted in relation to the research objectives with observations made based on the data collected. The interviews were meant to gather information from two different viewpoints. The first point of view is from customers in Ireland, intending to evaluate the influence of CSR activities on “New Look” brand equity as well as their viewpoint on overall CSR communication. The second is the company's overall strategy and communication in terms of CSR practices, as well as the most feasible manner to communicate it to customers.

The findings concerning the influence of CSR practices on “New Look” brand equity has suggested that it does influence brand equity as it has been presented by the researcher in the literature review chapter. Furthermore, the influence of CSR on brand equity is reinforced by a connection between factors and determinants. However, the level of influence of the customer's perspective and brand reputation was found to be moderate, followed by the low level of interest and awareness. This indicated a lack of consistency in the results. As a result, the extent to which any of these factors can influence brand equity has been found to be inconclusive.

The findings also reaffirmed that components of dimensions of CSR communications, such as transparency, informativeness can aid in reducing customer`s skepticism but also creating communication consistency and building credibility on long-term. Besides, the findings imply that the organization communicates with a focus on connection and coherence. Customers, on the other hand, would be more likely to be impacted if key factors such as evidence and transparency were implemented, as previously indicated.

Another important point is that the responses did not indicate a direct relationship to Integrated Marketing Communication and according to Vallaster et al. (2012) a credible and

consistent communications management strategy will be required to properly leverage the CSR strategically by integrating the 4Cs, which are consistency, coherence, continuity and complementary. Here where comes the integrated marketing communication (IMC) tool which according to Pickton and Broderick (2005) can boost marketing communications by integrating the 4Cs, which are consistency, coherence, continuity and complementary.

Although the majority of findings reaffirmed the literature presented by this research one key finding that was not very clear is an evident discrepancy between the company`s participant and the customers perspective since the customers demonstrated low awareness towards the company communication as well as lack of evidence and transparency, which indicates that the company might not be effective in terms of their CSR communication. Besides, the company`s participant provided incomplete or unclear responses. As a result, the data analysis was restricted. In this case, it was hard to ascertain whether the company is effectively communicating CSR practices to customers.

In summary, while some of the data were inconclusive, it is clear that CSR practices have an influence on “New Look” brand equity, and evidence and transparency were shown to be two of the elements why customers would be more likely to trust the brand. Furthermore, it was assumed that the IMC tool could be used to aid in the delivery of CSR practices communications by incorporating CSR dimensions of communications, which take into account the elements mentioned by customers as well as other factors previously mentioned that can aid in the delivery of effective communications to customers.

5. Contributions, Limitations and suggestions for future research

The results, as well as the constraints that arose during the study process, were summarized in this last chapter. The investigator has also given proposals for future research as well as recommendations that other researchers may consider while investigating the influence of CSR practices on brand equity and how to effectively communicate to customers.

5.1 Summary of findings

Regarding the first research objective, the findings highlighted an influence on “New Look” brand equity. However, it was noticed that due to the variables such as customers' perspective, level of interest, awareness, as well as brand reputation and skepticism, the level of influence might present different outcomes based on each variable.

Regarding the second objective, one key finding that was not very clear is an evident discrepancy between the company`s participant and the customers perspective. The reason is that the customers demonstrated low awareness towards the company communication as well as lack of evidence and transparency, which indicates that the company might not be effective in terms of their CSR communication.

Concerning the third, the main finding highlighted according to the comments of the customers, the company's communication especially on their website lacked information and evidence. As a result, it suggests that the company may not be including key elements such as informativeness, transparency, and consistency into its CSR communication in order to not only avoid skepticism but also to enhance CSR outcomes.

In terms of the fourth objective, the main finding implied that the organization communicates with a focus on connection and coherence. Customers, on the other hand, would be more likely to be impacted if key factors such as evidence and transparency were implemented. This showed that what is being communicated is not being effectively received by customers.

5.2 Implications of findings for the research question

As previously discussed within the findings, it was discovered that while CSR practices have an influence on a company's brand equity, the amount to which each of these variables influences overall brand equity has been shown to be inconclusive. As result, it is clear that the findings generated from the data revealed some unexpected variations from the literature reviewed in this study, which are outlined below.

- Price and quality as determinants for a customer`s level of interest to pay a higher price when the company is involved in CSR practices.

  Although the majority of the participants stated that they would be willing to pay a higher price for a company that practices CSR, they also stated that it would depend on how much more costly the product would be and the product's quality. In reviewing the literature no relevant data was found on specific determinants that would influence the customer`s level of interest when evaluating the company`s CSR practices, instead, it was treated as a potential variable without accounting for the determinants that can influence the customer's decision process, as revealed by the data.

Therefore, the company under study in order to better evaluate the influence of CSR on their brand equity should account for these variables that will potentially impact their strategy and outcomes.

- The level of relevance that customers place on CSR activities might be determined by the type of practices being undertaken.

Some participants indicated that if the company was active in social activities, the CSR practices would be more relevant, while others stated that employee treatment would generate more effect on them. As a result, it is worth noting that this variable might have an impact on the amount to which CSR activities influence brand equity, which is not widely explored in current empirical studies.

Eventually, the company should involve its stakeholders in the process in order to adapt more precisely to their needs and expectations in order to effectively communicate CSR activities. (Morsing and Schultz, 2006).

5.3 Contributions and limitations of the research

This dissertation can potentially contribute with useful insights from findings in order to guide the company under study or any other similar businesses to understand better the influence of CSR practices and its variables in order to better manage its influence on brand equity thus be able to enhance its competitive advantage. Besides, this study will prove useful in expanding our understanding of the influence of CSR practices on brand equity as well as how to communicate it effectively to customers, the reason for that is because these new findings could aid in improving assessments of the influence of CSR activities on brand equity, also how IMC as a potential marketing tool, when aligned with CSR communication best practices, might aid in enhancing CSR communications.

Whilst this dissertation generated useful insights to the company`s management under study, for being a case study the findings are restricted by the fact that it was a case study, which means the generalizability of the findings is subject to specific restrictions such as the context of analysis.

Furthermore, because the participants were chosen primarily through the “New Look” LinkedIn page, people who did not engage in the page did not have a chance to be chosen to participate. Additionally, while the author was able to create a pool with as much diversity as possible in terms of demographics, the author had limited assumptions on the level of interaction and knowledge the participants had with the company. Besides, the majority of

the participants had a bachelor's degree, which allowed the author to examine more extensive data, but it may have limited the analysis in terms of educational level diversity.

Additionally, due to time constraints and availability restrictions of participants, this study relied on limited data from the focused company, which might have influenced to some degree the findings of how effectively CSR is being communicated from the company's perspective.

In short, although asynchronous email interviews achieved the goals of enhancing participant flexibility, providing more detailed data, and obtaining a higher response rate. (Golding, 2014) The majority of the participants were unavailable for follow-up questions, which might have restricted the findings to some extent.

5.4 Recommendations for future research

Despite the limitations indicated in the preceding section, the author believes that the study's aims were mostly met and that the findings provide a reasonable basis for future studies. The findings of the data collected imply that more research should be done on particular factors that impact a customer's level of interest, awareness, and overall perception of CSR Practices. In fact, studies led by Peloza and Papania (2008); Carroll (2008) and Bögel (2019) have indicated that stakeholders` needs and expectations might impact CSR practices thus its outcomes.

Further, future studies might benefit from considering the influence that each CSR activity dimension would have on a customer's brand evaluation process. In addition, a more in-depth study is recommended to understand more about the various marketing tools that might be used to enhance CSR communications.

Previous studies have presented limitations and different variables concerning the business environment, which could lead to different customer`s expectations. (Xiaoli Nan and Kwangjun Heo, 2007; Sweeney and Coughlan, 2008; Villagra *et al.*, 2016). This dissertation focused on customer perceptions in Ireland, therefore, there is a chance to explore this subject in a broader context by researching various context environments, which may lead to different findings because customer`s perceptions of CSR activities may vary.

5.5 Conclusion and reflections

In this last chapter, the study findings were presented, as well as how they contributed to meeting the research objectives. Furthermore, challenges and limitations, as well as study

suggestions and significant points, were explored in order to provide helpful insights for future research in this field. Notwithstanding the relatively limited sample, this research offers valuable insights into the assumption of whether or not CSR practices influence brand equity and what factors should be considered in order to effectively communicate it to customers. The author hopes that the findings of this research will provide a different angle to the company's management as well as additional context for the academic area in order to build further research on the topic.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Informed Consent Form

Griffith College GBS

Informed Consent Form

I. Research Study Title: The influence of CSR practices on “New Look” brand equity and how to effectively communicate it to customers in Ireland led by Tatiana Martins Ribeiro de Moura Santos, a Griffith College Master of International Business Management student.

II. Purpose of the research: The purpose of this dissertation is to contribute to the literature about the influence of CSR practices on brand equity as well as how to communicate it effectively to customers. In order to do so, the author will conduct a case study on the company “New Look” by addressing the study goals through the evaluation of theories and frameworks related to CSR activities as a possible influencer and instrument for improving brand equity. Moreover, it will be evaluating potential marketing tools that when aligned to CSR might improve the communications to customers.

Interviews will be recorded, and transcriptions will be produced. The time commitment for the interviews is anticipated to be around 30 minutes for each interview. Participants face no risks as a result of their participation in this study. Participants are free to leave the Research Study at any time.

Participant – please complete the following (Circle Yes or No for each question)

I am aware that the data will be used to complete the investigator's course dissertation Yes ( ) No ( )

I have read the Plain Language Statement (or had it read to me) Yes ( )No ( )
I understand the information provided Yes ( )No ( )
I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study Yes( ) No ( )

I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions Yes ( )No ( )

I am aware that my interview will be recorded Yes( ) No ( )

I am aware that transcription of my interview will be made Yes ( ) No ( )

I may aware that I can withdraw from the Research Study at any point Yes ( )No( )

I am aware that all data here provided will only be used for academic purposes Yes ()No ( )

I am aware that my real name will not be disclosed in the study Yes( )No()

IV. I am aware that the involvement in the Research Study is voluntary Yes ( ) No ( )

I am aware that my identity will be kept confidential and that the data collected will only the used for academic purposes only. I am also aware that access to this data will only be possible to the researcher and the university when assessing the process, and that the data will be destroyed within a period of one month after the approval and successful completion of the dissertation. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researchers, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project

Participants Signature:_____

Witness:_____

Date :_____

Appendix B - Plain Language Statement form

Griffith College
Plain Language Statement

1. An Introduction to the Research Study

Research Title: The influence of CSR practices on "New Look" brand equity and how to effectively communicate it to customers in Ireland led by Tatiana Martins Ribeiro de Moura Santos, a Griffith College Master of International Business Management student.

To address the research's gaps in terms of issues and limitations, the study will concentrate on a single organization and a single location, to evaluate to what extent CSR practices and effective communication can affect News Look`s brand equity. In other words, this study aims to provide the company under study, as well as other similar businesses, useful frameworks, theories, models and data to contribute to a broader understanding and generate more accurate and realistic insights on whether CSR practices can potentially affect a company's brand equity, as well as how to enhance CSR practices awareness and exposure by effectively communicating them to consumers, in order to assist in the long-term development of sustainable brand equity.
The questions for the interview will be around the following themes:

- Brand Reputation
- Brand Equity
- CSR practices

The purpose of this dissertation is to contribute to the literature about the influence of CSR practices on brand equity as well as how to communicate it effectively to customers. In order to do so, the author will conduct a case study on the company "New Look". By investigating the objectives of this research through the assessment of theories, framework concerning CSR practices as a moderator to improve brand equity, as well as what marketing strategy can be better aligned with CSR practices to improve brand equity, the researcher will be able to identify the real influence of CSR practices on the company's brand equity.

The identity of the participants will be kept confidential. The data collected will only the used for academic purposes only. Access to this data will only be possible to the researcher and the university when assessing the process.
The data will be destroyed within a period of one month after the approval and successful completion of the dissertation.

All the interviews will be done online, and the names of participants will be kept in anonymity. None of the participants will know who else is being interviewed. I am the only person who will know the identities of the participants.

If participants have concerns about this study, please contact me at tatiana.ribeiro17@gmail.com.

If you wish to contact an independent person.

Please contact: vlasios.sarantinos@griffith.ie Griffith College Research Ethics Committee

South Circular Road, Dublin 8, Ireland, Tel: +353 1 4163324

Appendix C – Interviews Questions: Customers

This interview will be focusing in assessing the level to which CSR practices influence brand equity. You will be asked open-ended questions that will take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

1) How old are you?

18 – 25 years old ( )

26 – 35 years old ( )

36 – 45 years old ( )

46 –55 years old ( )

56 – 65 years old ( )

I prefer not to say ( )

2) What is your gender?

Female ( )

Male ( )

I prefer not to say ( )

3) What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?

High school graduate ( )

Bachelor's degree ( )

Master's degree ( )

Professional degree ( )

Doctorate degree ( )

4) Are you currently living in Ireland?

Yes ( )

No ( )

5) How well do you understand and is aware of the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)? Does it catch your interest? Either way, why?

6) Would you be inclined to pay a higher price if it guaranteed that the business acted in a socially responsible manner?

7) In your perspective, what makes a company responsible?

8) In your perspective, what are the most significant reasons for businesses to engage in CSR activities?

9) In your perspective, how does CSR influence a company's image?

10) Would you be more interested in purchasing "New Look" products if the company`s reputation as an environmentally friendly brand was stronger?

11) Would you avoid purchasing a company's products if they had a past history of poor Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)? Would you be sharing your negative thoughts/views with others?

12) Would you have less faith in the company's CSR efforts if it had a negative reputation in the past?

13) Do you recognize "New Look" as a responsible company? Why?

14) Did you hear of any activities that "New Look" undertake to be socially and environmentally responsible? If yes, what are these activities? How do you evaluate/appraise them?

15) "New Look" has a social media campaign called "New Look kind, fashion that won't cost the earth." Do you want to learn more about this campaign because of its slogan? And what would motivate you to find out more?

16) Do you research companies that engage in environmentally friendly practices?

17) Do you use to buy on fast fashion stores?

Appendix D – Interviews Questions: Company

This interview will be dealing with identifying the company`s current self-perception in terms of CSR practices and branding strategy, as well as the main challenges associated with communicating it to customers. Therefore, it will be open-ended questions focusing mainly on brand reputation, type of approach concerning CSR involvement, as well as a communication strategy and implementation issues.

The questions will approximately take 30 minutes to answer.

1) What is your present position in the organization?
2) Have you been in this position for a long time?
   Are you currently living in Ireland?
3) What is your knowledge and perception regarding the organisation's CSR?
4) According to empirical studies, CSR may have little benefits on brand equity due to stakeholder skepticism, (eg. Customers, Shareholders etc.) which might be related to the company's reputation or how the practices are communicated (Bögel, 2019a). Do you believe the company's CSR activities have benefited or damaged the company's overall brand equity? Could highlight the main points of the benefits or damages?

   6) In terms of CSR engagement, a company may choose to be proactive or reactive in terms of CSR practices. In your perspective, what is the organization's strategy in terms of engagement and why?

   7) It is generally recognized that when CSR is employed as a brand strategy, it may have a substantial influence on brand equity. Is the company's brand strategy in line with CSR practices? If yes, what are the main factors considered when aligning CSR practices and brand strategy. If no, what are the main objectives of handling CSR practices with no connection with branding?

   8) The fast fashion industry is notorious for its potential impact on social and environmental issues. What is your view on the company's past and current reputation concerning these issues?

   9)According to empirical studies CSR can be applied as a moderator to impact positively both brand reputation and brand equity? Does the company have ever applied this strategy? If yes, what are the main positive and negative outcomes?

10) What are the key factors that the firm considers when it comes to CSR activities in order to improve its brand reputation? eg. Specific CSR practices dimensions, Communication strategy etc)

11) According to Mintel (2021), fashion retailers are investing more intensely in CSR practices. What are the key points, in your view, where the organization can increase its investments or approach in terms of CSR practices and why?

12)What are the strategy and main factors that are taken into account when the company is communicating CSR practices?

13) In your opinion, what would be the most feasible and reasonable way of communicating CSR practices?

14) What are the company's most prevalent marketing tools and channels for communicating its CSR practices?

15) What are the potential internal and external challenges that the company face when communicating CSR practices?

16) Does the company apply any specific strategy in order to deal with it? Do you have any examples to share, good or bad?

Appendix E – Interviews

In order to keep the present session more concise, the fourteen interview transcriptions are provided in the link below.

Interviews with customers

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1TBEKrHLGhtpeWtPaR_tLUBTC0spmpk99?usp=sharing

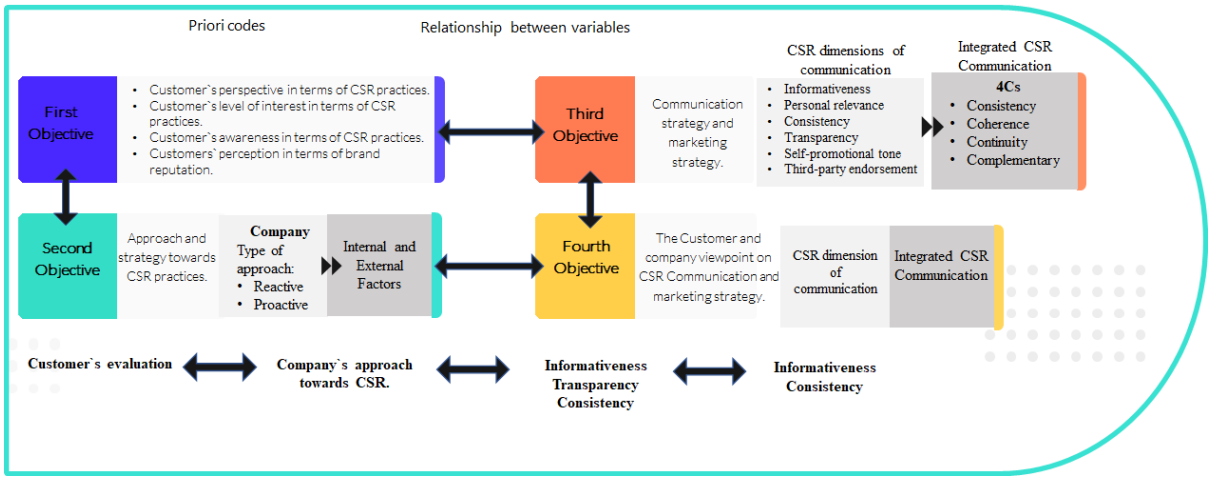
Interview with the company

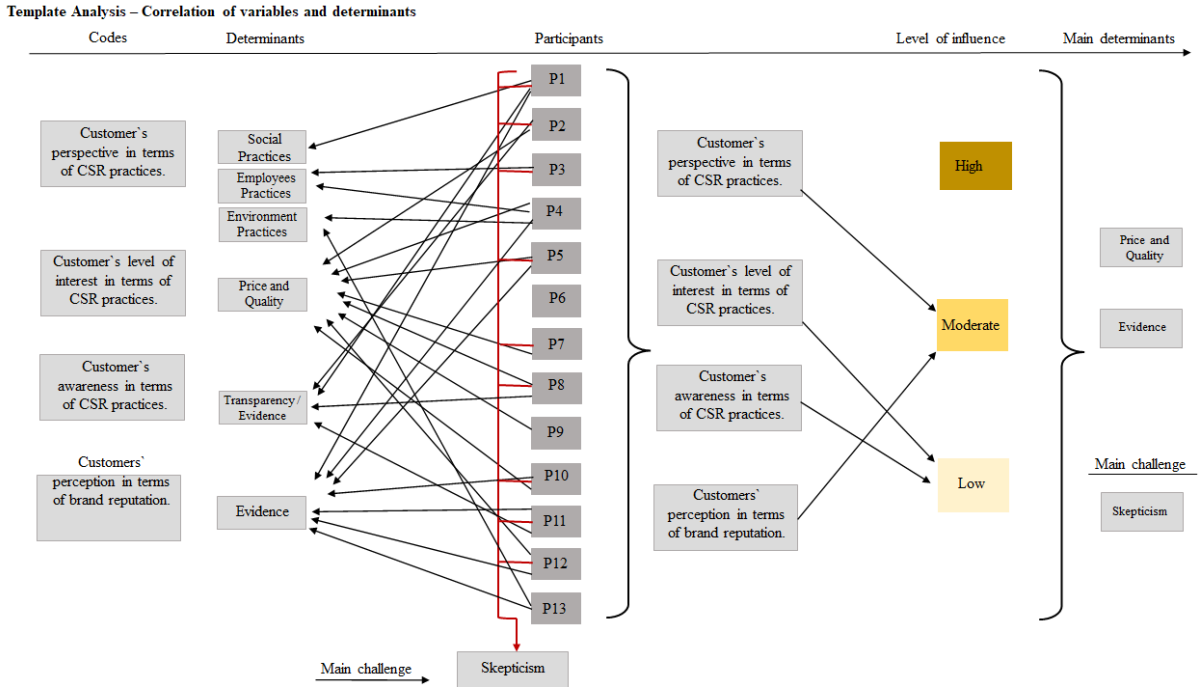
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1ib1MtuYWgltOTP4U7TLNP-dmVW5tLfhU?usp=sharing

Appendix F – Coded Data

The tables presented in this session is also available in the in the link below:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1F--3fpUlIzBKMpurXmKPpL5fJC6SYDkF?usp=sharing





First objective

Level of influence		Participants														
Objective	**Code**	**Definiton**	**P1**	**P2**	**P3**	**P4**	**P5**	**P6**	**P7**	**P8**	**P9**	**P10**	**P11**	**P12**	**P13**	**Result**
Influence of Corporate Social Responsibility on brand equity of "New Look".	Customer`s perspective in terms of CSR practices.	The customer's perception of the relevance of CSR practices.	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	High	Moderate	Moderate	Low	Moderate	Low	Low	High	Low	High	Moderate
	Customer`s level of interest in terms of CSR practices.	Customers are willing to do more research and pay more to support CSR efforts.	Low	Low	Low	High	Moderate	Low	Low	Moderate	Low	Low	High	Low	High	Low
	Customer`s awareness in terms of CSR practices.	Customer`s awareness of New Look CSR practices.	Low	Low	Moderate	Low	Low	Low	Low	Moderate	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low
	Customers` perception in terms of brand reputation.	Customer`s response to bad brand reputation.	Moderate	Moderate	Low	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Low	Moderate	Low	Low	High	High	Moderate	Moderate

Second Objective

Objective	Code	Definiton	EXEMPLO 1	EXEMPLO 2	EXEMPLO 3	EXEMPLO 4	EXEMPLO 5	EXEMPLO 6	Result
Assess the company`s perspective and strategy in terms of CSR practices.	Approach and strategy towards CSR practices: Type of approach: (*) Reactive (*) Proactive (*) Internal Challenges (*) External Challenges	Company`s perspective and strategy in terms of CSR practices	"The company strategy is a mix of proactive and reactive. Because, the company apply all necessaries approaches to fulfill all compliance requirements, and when it is feasible, the company undertake broader projects that would not have a big interference in our products cost and yet would positively contribute to the society, environment	"We haven't linked CSR directly to those factors, however, we believe it is consequence of all actions	"The company's CSR approach is embedded with some aspects of brand strategy, such as the brand image. However, it isn't drawn a clear relation to brand strategy."	"I believe that our CSR efforts have helped the company in a variety of ways. As an example. The corporation follows all compliance standards and works with business associations, non-governmental organizations, and labor unions on important initiatives based on social compliance. This helps to maintain a positive corporate image not	"As a result, the company's reputation has grown positively and will continue to do so. Although we recognize that we're not there yet. But we're on our way."	"Regarding the remaining questions, I would rather not comment on them."	Reactive approach towards CSR Potential benefits : Not clearly Strategy - Unclear

Third Objective

Objective	Code	Definiton	EXEMPLO 1	EXEMPLO 2	EXEMPLO 3	EXEMPLO 4	Result
Assess the company`s current CSR communication strategy	Communication strateg: Benefits, challenges and marketing strategy. Dimensions of communication: (*)Informativeness (*)Personal relevance (*)Consistency (*)Transparency (*) Self-promotional tone (*)Third-party endorsement Integrated Marketing Communication: 4Cs	The company`s strategy and main factors that are taken into account when the company is communicating CSR practices.	"We examine if the message is clear and coherent. Furthermore, we analyze what the campaign or statement is and where it would be more pleasing and simpler for our stakeholders to locate."	"The most realistic and logical approach would be to ensure that our stakeholders understand the message while keeping the message basic but significant in meaning."	"I don't have a lot of knowledge regarding marketing tools. However, I am aware that our approach includes communicating via our website, social media, and so on."	"I`m am not directly associated with the communication strategy. However, I don't believe we confront many challenges. When we talk about our CSR initiatives, we believe that our customers feel more connected to the company."	Marketing Strategy : unclear Main factors :coherence and accessibility.

Fourth Objective

Customers			EXAMPLES				
Objective	**Code**	**Definiton**	**P1**	**P2**	**P3**	**P4**	
			Skeptical	**Skeptical**	**Skeptical**	**Positive**	
To explore how to effectively communicate CSR to customers	Key communications factors and marketing strategy	Evaluation of customer viewpoint on the "New Look" campaign called "New Look Kind," as well as current overall CSR communication taking into account CSR dimensions of communication.	I believe New Look for example didn't put enough effort to communicate that they really care I think it's it's for a company in such a level the resources the materials and I think a student in the first year actually could do a little bit better in sending the information and if the this company who says they do those things or invest so how much €5? because I don't see more effort than this I don't see those we've been there we do that where are their CEOs where are the management going to those places where the movies from those places what is the activity that I can even relate from those website, then social media I didn't go through their social media but if the website doesn't communicate that I I felt that they can do really better because at this moment I think they're just doing that because of social pressure from that it's trendy now in order to keep the revenues we need to have those statements numbers.	I think more about how they are doing. It really catches me part that " won't cost the earth" I think I would like to know more about it and how they are doing this. How this work	Well it's it's really interesting because initially and what do they mean when they say don't cost the earth like don't cost the earth environmentally or is it like a phrase like doesn't cost the money in the world and so expensive so I I'd be enticed for both and I'd go let me research this and find out which ones they mean.	Yeah. I would like to. I would like to know more about their campaign on how there they worked because as I said I like the brand, I like sometimes I see the clothing that's nice that's nice so if I know how they are manufacturing their products. I would buy them yeah.	
			P5	**P6**	**P7**	**P8**	
			Positive	**Positive**	**Not interested**	**Skeptical**	
To explore how to effectively communicate CSR to customers	Key communications factors and marketing strategy	Evaluation of customer viewpoint on the "New Look" campaign called "New Look Kind," as well as current overall CSR communication taking into account CSR dimensions of communication.	Yes, I like this slogan because they use I think they use a keyword that catches everybody attention like not costing the earth and in that, well my idea in that sense is that it like it won't be very expensive and also won't harm the environment as well. I don't know if that was their intention but looking in and seeing this slogan makes me have this his opinion end to understanding that sense I would be more like I would like to learn more about their social responsibilities practices.	Yeah it's like fresh I would definitely be interested to know more about the quality of the product and everything.	No, I don't want to learn more about the campaign. To get me interested in this company, I would need to hear from people that surround me that they bought something from there that was at a good price and the quality impressed them.	The slogan is appealing, although to really claim it textiles would need to be e.g. 100% recyclables, and is that the case? If not, the campaign statement is misleading.	
			P9	**P10**	**P11**	**P12**	**P13**
			Skeptical	**Not interested**	**Skeptical**	**Not interested**	**Positive**
To explore how to effectively communicate CSR to customers	Key communications factors and marketing strategy	Evaluation of customer viewpoint on the "New Look" campaign called "New Look Kind," as well as current overall CSR communication taking into account CSR dimensions of communication.	I would be interested to know more about it, I would like to know how they do with the waste that the company produce.	No. I would be interested in the quality, utility and price of the product.	Yes, that slogan if effective. I would like to know what they mean about '…won't cost the earth' as the fashion industry is so wasteful and uses up so much water and material and is disgarded and goes to form clothes mountains in poor countries. I would love to see a large brand tackle this. My motivation would be to see if it	No,Unless it tapped into a need I had	Yes so in this case, yes. When you see a good slogan you want to read more and have more information about this.

Company			EXAMPLES				
Objective	**Code**	**Definiton**	**EXEMPLO 1**	**EXEMPLO 1**	**EXEMPLO 1**	**EXEMPLO 1**	**Result**
To explore how to effectively communicate CSR to customers	**Main variables**: Informativeness, Endorsement,Personal Relevance, Consistency, Message tone and Transparency. **Marketing Strategy**	Key factors when communicating CSR and marketing strategy used by the company.	"We examine if the message is clear and coherent. Furthermore, we analyze what the campaign or statement is and where it would be more pleasing and simpler for our stakeholders to locate."	"The most realistic and logical approach would be to ensure that our stakeholders understand the message while keeping the message basic but significant in meaning."	"I don't have a lot of knowledge regarding marketing tools. However, I am aware that our approach includes communicating via our website, social media, and so on."	"I'm am not directly associated with the communication strategy. However, I don't believe we confront many challenges. When we talk about our CSR initiatives, we believe that our customers feel more connected to the company."	CSR communication Main points: Clear and coherent Marketing strategy: unclear Channels : website and social media Message that delivery basic content but deep in meaning.